



PRINCIPLES *of*  
**GOOD**  
**URBAN**  
**DESIGN**  
*for* NEW YORK CITY



A tool for everyone interested in creating better neighborhoods through design.

# Principles of Good Urban Design for New York City

The City of New York  
Mayor Eric Adams

Department of City Planning  
Daniel R. Garodnick, Director



October 2025  
[www.nyc.gov/planning](http://www.nyc.gov/planning)



There's no question that urban design impacts the lives of all New Yorkers. Whether it's the buildings we live in, the streets we cross, the parks we play in, or broader issues of housing, climate adaptation, public space, or transit accessibility, questions of design are always at stake.

It's with this context in mind that the Department of City Planning (DCP) created the *Principles of Good Urban Design* guidebook, which explains New York City's urban design principles, so New Yorkers can use them to advocate for positive change in their neighborhoods and across the city. The guidebook is the result of a multi-year public engagement process and reflects the input of a wide variety of stakeholders, including over 1,500 New Yorkers who submitted feedback online. Inclusive design requires a shared, accessible framework and this guidebook reflects that.

Indeed, making our guidelines clear and accessible is a central priority of ours. It's the driving force behind new digital tools we've created that put planning data at New Yorkers' fingertips, as well as our ambitious *City of Yes* proposals to replace outdated 20th-century zoning regulations with clear, sensible rules that meet our 21st-century needs. NYC's *Principles of Good Urban Design* were created in the same spirit.

In addition to explaining *The Principles*, this guidebook illustrates how they are put into practice with real-world examples of high-quality urban design. These include the recently-opened Sendero Verde in Harlem, the world's largest fully-affordable Passive House building, and the East New York Neighborhood Plan, a collaboratively-developed roadmap for new housing, economic development, community services, and public spaces in a historically-underinvested neighborhood.

As these projects demonstrate, good urban design not only improves the built environment and enhances our daily lives, it can also bring us together into conversation and collaboration, and it can help make our city a more equitable, resilient, and affordable place to live.

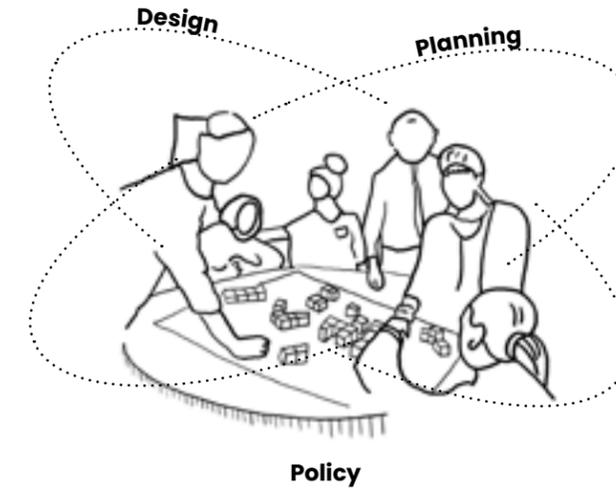
In partnership,

Handwritten signature of Daniel R. Garodnick.

**Daniel R. Garodnick**

Director, New York City Department of City Planning (DCP)  
Chair of the City Planning Commission (CPC)





## Preamble

The NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) helps shape a more livable city by advocating for high-quality design of the built environment. At DCP, urban design work happens at the intersection of architecture, planning, and policy. It entails:

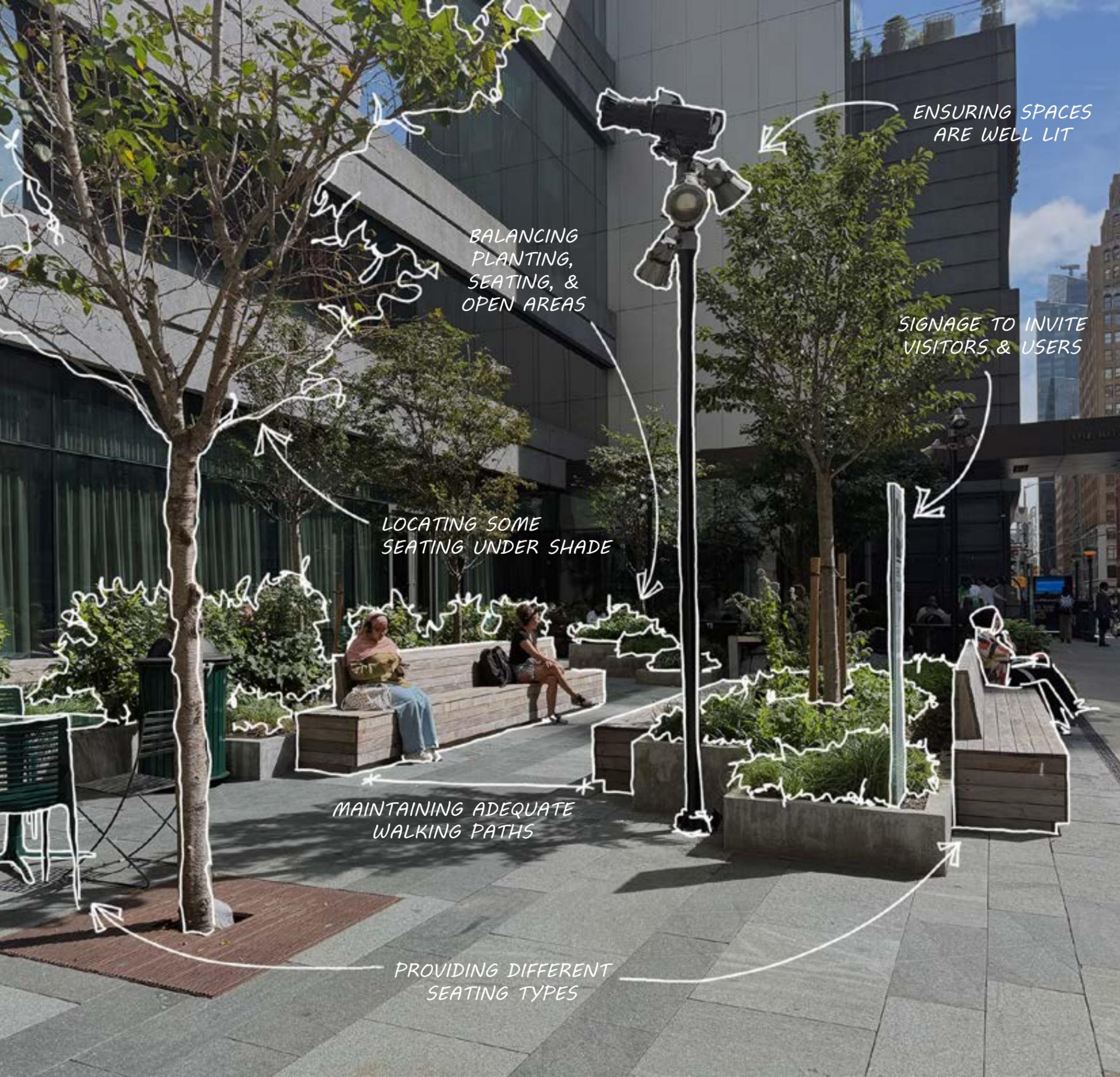
- Incorporating design best practices into city policies
- Critiquing design proposals from private developers to promote better design throughout the city
- Helping to define a clear vision for the built environment during neighborhood planning efforts
- Creating civic engagement tools to get people more involved in urban design and city planning
- Supporting the work of other city agencies by providing urban design analysis and expertise
- Conducting design research to stay current with and get ahead of development trends

The role of urban design in NYC has become more fundamental in planning processes and political discourse throughout the past two decades. Collectively we must strive for our planning and policy objectives to be designed with care and attention to detail, doing so in a coordinated fashion across city agencies, and by working with shared values. It is our aim that the *Principles for Good Urban Design* can serve as this bridge.



# CONTENTS

- 1 Urban Design in NYC** (pages 1-12)  
A primer on urban design and introduction to this guidebook.
- 2 The Principles** (pages 13-32)  
Illustrations, language, and objectives to explain how to achieve better design outcomes in all parts of the city.
- 3 The Principles in Place** (pages 33-48)  
Real-world project examples to showcase how *The Principles* take shape in different spaces across the city.
- 4 Resources and Acknowledgments** (pages 49-60)  
Resources, references, and terms to learn more about urban design and get involved in planning projects.



# 1

## URBAN DESIGN IN NYC

As we move through the city, our physical surroundings play an essential role in our daily encounters and how we feel. The design of streets, buildings, plazas, parks, and other shared spaces influence choices for how we get around and affect our experiences, whether positive or negative. This chapter describes how urban design relates to our daily experiences and establishes why good urban design is fundamental to improving the quality and functionality of spaces across NYC.

### Chapter Contents

- What Is Urban Design and Why Is It Important?
- Purpose of *The Principles*
- Who Should Read This and What Can You Expect to Learn?

# What Is Urban Design and Why Is It Important?

Urban design is the process of shaping buildings, streets, and open spaces to make the city more functional, beautiful, and well-connected. It considers how people experience places throughout the city, ensuring that their surroundings support a healthy lifestyle and provide them with opportunities to thrive. Urban design takes into account systems such as transportation, infrastructure, parks and public space, among others, as well as community priorities to make sure that NYC's built environment is well-coordinated and responsive to local needs. While design is a component of urban planning, it is inherent to every project.

## What are the present planning challenges?

NYC is a dynamic and vibrant world capital. It is a city in constant change, re-inventing and adapting itself to meet the demands and challenges of the present while keeping an eye towards the future. This has always been the reality for NYC, and recent years have been no different. The city faces a housing shortage that continues to drive up housing costs, greater frequency of major storms, the aftermath of a pandemic that highlighted supply chain vulnerabilities, congestion and safety issues on the city's roadways, as well as inequities and structural racism. These challenges are being tackled by city agencies, elected officials, civic groups, community advocates, and the private sector. They are also the basis for DCP's planning priorities and sit as the backdrop for any project under consideration at the City Planning Commission.

In NYC, planning happens at various scales, from a single residential building to a neighborhood plan, or initiatives with citywide implications. No matter the theme or scale of the project, input comes from many stakeholders (politicians, community groups, private interests, etc.) who round out a process that can be quite complex. Urban design should be central in discussions between these groups as it is integral to how we plan the future of NYC.

## Why does NYC need good urban design?

A thriving city invests in its people and the positive experiences it can bring to them. Good urban design makes people feel safe, comfortable, and engaged as they move around. When urban design is an afterthought, people may find themselves surrounded by unattractive buildings, flood barriers that block them from seeing the waterfront, unsafe street conditions, and policing structures that

### Ground Floors

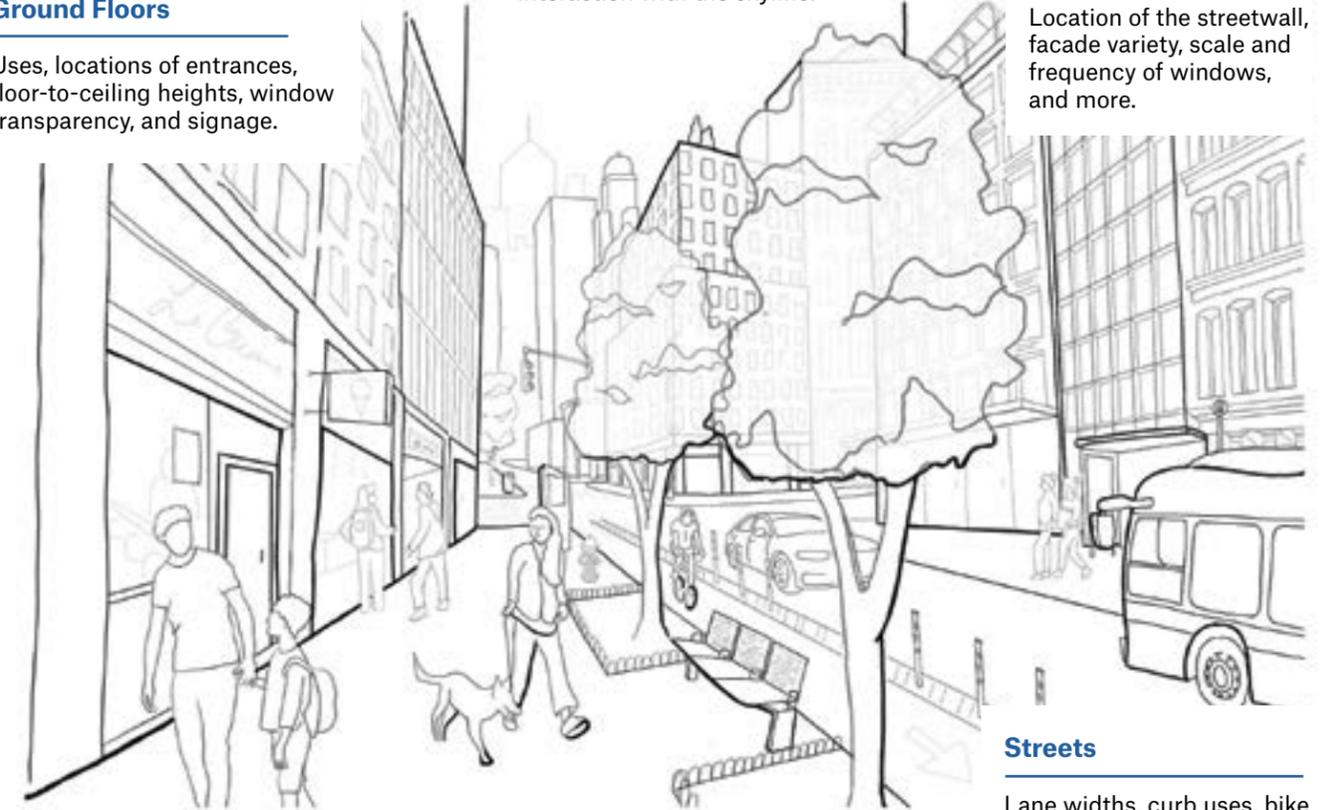
Uses, locations of entrances, floor-to-ceiling heights, window transparency, and signage.

### Buildings

Building uses, shapes, variety in tower heights, and interaction with the skyline.

### Facades

Location of the streetwall, facade variety, scale and frequency of windows, and more.



### Sidewalks

Sidewalk widths, street trees, bike parking, bus stops, seating, waste management, and more.

### Streets

Lane widths, curb uses, bike lanes, crosswalk locations and crossing distances, drainage, and more.

↑ These are common physical features of a city block that are informed by urban design.

prevent them from enjoying public spaces. NYC needs good urban design not only to enhance our quality of life, but also to address the present and future challenges: improving our public space network, creating new housing that is attractive, protecting us from storms and other climate disasters, expanding the options for how we get around, ensuring equitable enjoyment of the city, and more.

## How to think like an urban designer

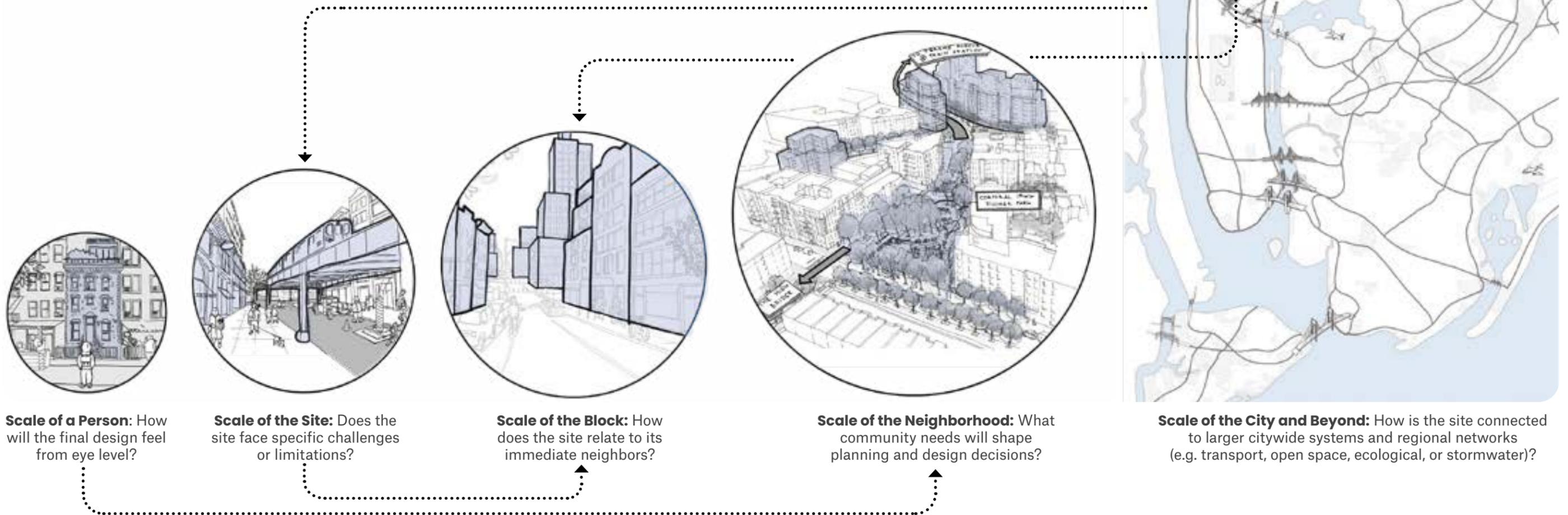
Good urban design is at its best when anyone interested in shaping their surroundings feels welcome to speak up. Use the examples below to think like an urban designer and advocate for more people-centered design in your neighborhood.

Urban designers do not singularly focus on the design of a building or an open space. They think about how a building relates to the block and how it can make a valuable contribution to a neighborhood or to the city. Let's say there's a building proposed in your neighborhood. When evaluating that building, think about the relationships between different scales. You can begin by picturing yourself moving down the sidewalk. You would notice how the proposed building stands in relation to the

street. The ground and lower floors of the building would be most prominent from your perspective. You should assess how they relate to neighboring buildings or imagine what kinds of activities could occur on the ground floor to make the space more functional and welcoming. You should also consider whether the street is designed to support people of different ages and abilities, including those who are biking or taking public transit.

Urban design also requires thinking about how to use space efficiently and connect local strategies to larger planning goals. For instance, a small plaza sitting next to a new building often includes planting beds to make the space more appealing. At the same time, the planting beds can be part of a larger system that collects stormwater within the project site, preventing that water from entering the city's overburdened storm sewer system.

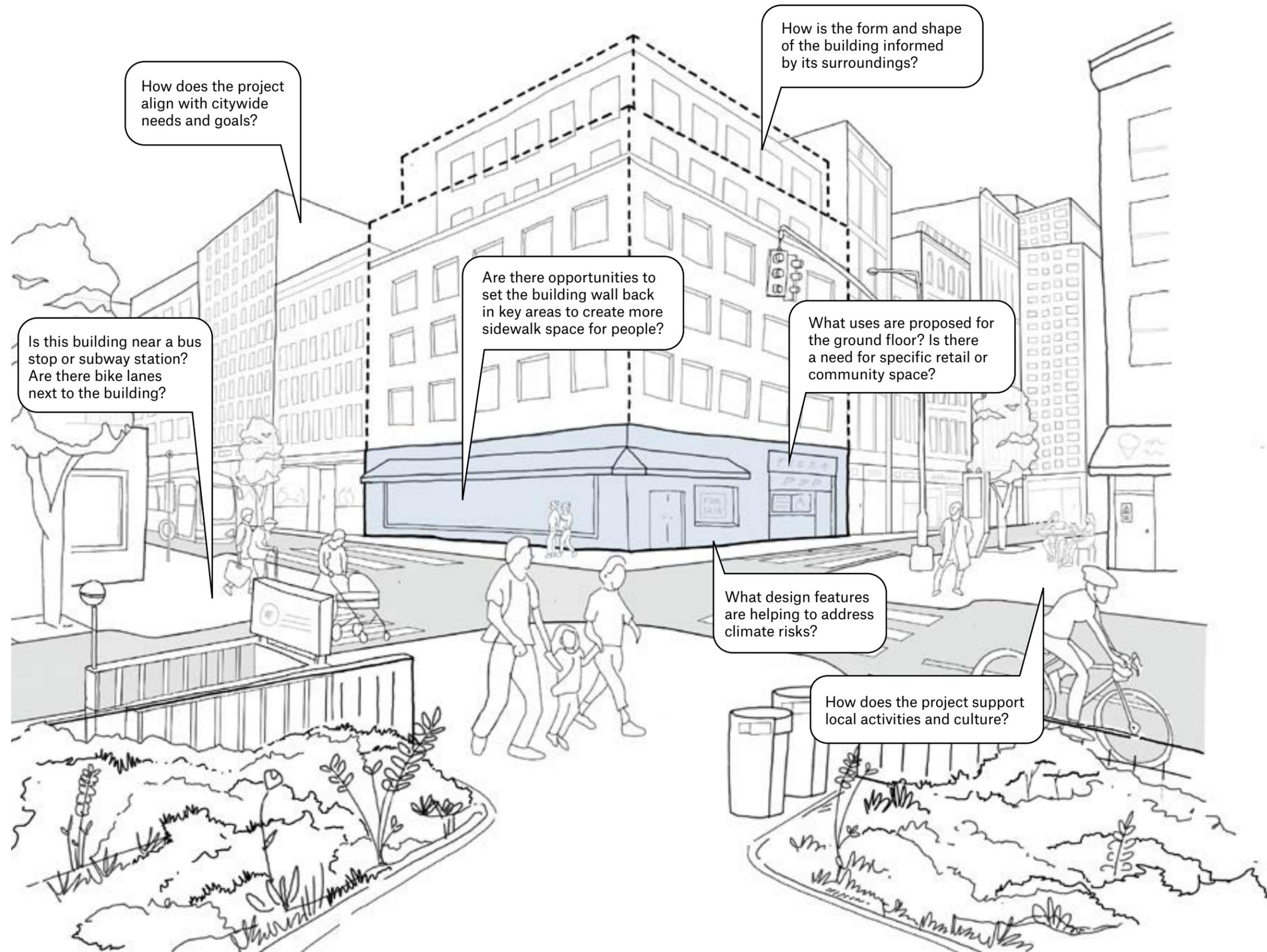
↓ No matter the size, location, or budget of a project, it should be approached from a variety of perspectives. This ensures that projects are integrated with their surroundings and can capitalize on opportunities that make the city function better for its people. Use the diagram below to assess a project from multiple scales.



You should also consider what uses (e.g. businesses, services, or amenities) the new building brings to the neighborhood. Has the community identified a need, such as a grocery store, school, or library, that could be incorporated within the lower floors of the building? Good urban design makes these spaces feel inviting to passersby by thinking about how lower floors can be differentiated from upper floors, how to draw people to building entrances, and how to maximize visual connections between indoor and outdoor spaces.

### How do people talk about design?

NYC's nearly 9 million people are spread across 304 square miles. Each neighborhood has a different demographic, a unique set of challenges, distinct community needs, and varied opinions about potential change. It's challenging to translate into words how a public space or building makes us feel or to convey how a design solution is not simply a choice in aesthetics. When we see an empty lot with construction fencing going up it can conjure up many thoughts and feelings—from excitement about what new uses or amenities may come to the block, to anxiety that a new building may shift neighborhood dynamics, to something in between. We all have different opinions about the future of our neighborhoods, and it is valuable to hear all perspectives when talking about urban design. This guidebook provides a shared set of values and resources to help New Yorkers continue these constructive conversations.



↑ The following prompts can spark conversations about urban design in your community. In the example shown, a new mixed-use building is proposed along a retail corridor close to public transit.

## Purpose of *The Principles*

*The Principles* are a set of values and goals that inform how we approach the design of NYC. These principles are a lens through which we examine not only how the city looks, but also of how it feels to live, work, come together, and move around the city. They describe how design can influence one's daily experience of the city by making it more enjoyable and comfortable; how design can support quality of life, well-being, and health; and how design can help foster a sense of belonging and civic pride. Ultimately, *The Principles of Good Urban Design* communicate a vision of a city that works for everyone—a city that New Yorkers deserve.

↓ The illustration below depicts the many layers of urban design—buildings of different sizes, the network of streets, parks, and plazas, and natural resources, such as the waterfront. Good urban design shapes these elements in a way that makes the city more functional, beautiful, and well-connected. It is a holistic approach to planning and designing the city.



---

**Good urban design is centered on the experience of daily life and care for our neighborhoods so that we may continue to embrace our dynamic city and confront the challenges ahead.**

---

## Who Should Read This and What Can You Expect to Learn?

This guidebook explains how urban design can improve neighborhoods across NYC. It is a shared resource and advocacy tool for everyone interested in learning, testing, and using *The Principles* to strive for better design outcomes.



### Members of the Public

Those who live in, work in, and visit NYC have an intimate knowledge of the city and what they do and do not like. This guidebook provides the public with helpful tools to participate in the design process and help shape the city through their own lived experience.



### Professionals

Designers, planners, engineers, and other professionals are experts in creating and assembling the elements that constitute the city. This guidebook can provide professionals with important considerations to ensure these elements are shaped and organized in a cohesive manner.



### The Government

City agencies, elected officials, and other government entities play an important role in how public policy shapes the city. This guidebook can help ensure consistent design messaging across the government that is aligned with city policy and priorities.



### Developers

Builders and other real estate professionals are responsible for developing and realizing projects across the city. This guidebook can demonstrate how good design benefits financial and community investments alike.

### Driving Goals of The Guidebook:

1

By defining what is good urban design, **we can set expectations that align with a vision for the city.**

2

By outlining an approach to good urban design, **we can shape better design outcomes.**

3

By promoting examples of good design, **we can illustrate how urban design goes beyond aesthetics.**

4

By simplifying design language, **we can involve everyone in planning and design discussions.**

Here are just a few examples of how anyone can use this guidebook:

- You could bring this guidebook to your local Community Board when a proposed development in your neighborhood is being discussed. Pages 7-8 provide example questions you could pose in conversations about the proposal.
- You may want to share your own idea or example of a well-designed building or open space and draw from the examples on pages 33-48.
- You may be navigating through a public review process and using *The Principles* to align your goals with that of the City's.
- Or you may have a citywide policy idea that involves multiple city agencies and you need to connect them to broader design, planning, and regulatory factors.

*The Principles of Good Urban Design* and this guidebook provide a platform to execute a variety of projects and initiatives that create a safe, sustainable, and equitable built environment.



# 2

## THE PRINCIPLES

Urban design is not just about aesthetics. It involves a rigorous process of investigation, civic engagement, and analysis, to support thoughtful design outcomes. This chapter presents the four *Principles of Good Urban Design*, plus actionable goals to help New Yorkers bring each principle to life.

### Chapter Contents

- The Principles of Good Urban Design
- Principle 1: Enhance People's Daily Lives
- Principle 2: Care for a Neighborhood's History, Culture, and Identity
- Principle 3: Embrace the City's Dynamism
- Principle 4: Confront Society's Greatest Challenges

# The Principles of Good Urban Design



## 1 Enhance People's Daily Lives

Good design can contribute to a more inclusive, enjoyable experience that supports everyday life in the city. Whether it's a sidewalk that is wide enough for rush hour crowds, the elevator that provides wheelchair access to a subway station, storefronts that enliven a neighborhood street, or a plaza that has comfortable chairs to relax in, the details of how we design our city matter and help contribute to a friendlier, more inclusive, enjoyable experience for everyone. Ultimately, a well-designed city creates a place of belonging where people feel not only like they are part of the city, but also that the city is part of them.

## 2 Care for a Neighborhood's History, Culture, and Identity

Caring for what makes a neighborhood unique can help foster a sense of belonging, community, and civic pride. Good design should respect the histories, identities, and cultures that have shaped and continue to shape the city's many diverse neighborhoods. Whether it is new architecture that complements neighboring buildings, a playground that meets the needs of different age groups, a new plaza that has the flexibility to accommodate community gatherings and festivals, or a project that incorporates landscape features that reinforces the ecology of a place, the layers of a neighborhood's identity should be reflected in how it looks and feels.

## 3 Embrace the City's Dynamism

New York City is an unparalleled, dynamic, and vibrant world capital. Good urban design does more than organize and structure our city—it embraces the icons and opportunities that have made NYC a magnet for generations to visit, work, or settle for a lifetime. Whether it is the iconic landmarks admired around the world, the bustling commercial districts driving innovation, the vibrant parks that everyone can enjoy, or the rhythm of buildings and storefronts that provide distinct character to each neighborhood. Design can challenge preconceptions, advance progress, and spark new ideas.

## 4 Confront Society's Greatest Challenges

New York City must secure its future against the greatest challenges of today and tomorrow, from the climate crisis to social inequity. We must make design choices that help us build a stronger, fairer, more adaptable city. Whether it is healing the wounds created by highways that cut through well-established neighborhoods, acknowledging the damage of racist policies such as 'redlining', or responding to other spatial injustices, we must ensure the city is a livable place for all New Yorkers. Design can help protect communities that are most vulnerable to the climate crisis and provide quality affordable housing that instills the feeling of civic pride.



# Objectives

The following categories and detailed actions demonstrate how good urban design can enhance people's daily lives.



## Accessibility and Safety

---

- Providing people of all ages and abilities with an easy, safe, and comfortable experience on streets and within all our city's shared spaces.
- Improving convenience of everyday life by ensuring access to essential neighborhood assets and services such as schools, open spaces, libraries and community facilities, grocery stores, pharmacies and health facilities, banking, and laundromat facilities.
- Ensuring safety in daytime and nighttime with good lighting, clear sight lines, and inviting spaces.
- Incorporating a variety of spaces to sit, socialize, or take shelter, as well as opportunities for play.



## Mobility and Connectivity

---

- Prioritizing sustainable mobility by encouraging walking, cycling, and public transit.
- Facilitating convenient and comfortable transfers between modes of transit, while providing an opportunity to sit and rest during commutes.
- Making navigation easier by using building features—such as easy-to-spot transit entries, visible access to indoor public spaces, and buildings that recess to expand the sidewalk—to connect the city's network of inviting public spaces.
- Providing basic public services, such as bathrooms, drinking fountains, and Wi-Fi, and ensuring they are equally distributed across the city.



## Comfort and Beauty

---

- Ensuring everyone has a short journey to quiet, leafy, and clean open spaces that offer New Yorkers moments of respite from busy urban life.
- Prioritizing activities, amenities, and architectural variety along the lower portions of buildings to create visual interest and enhance the pedestrian experience.
- Finding opportunities for family-friendly design with programming and play spaces for all ages.
- Creating cleaner, more attractive streets to promote a healthier and more enjoyable environment.



## Quality and Durability

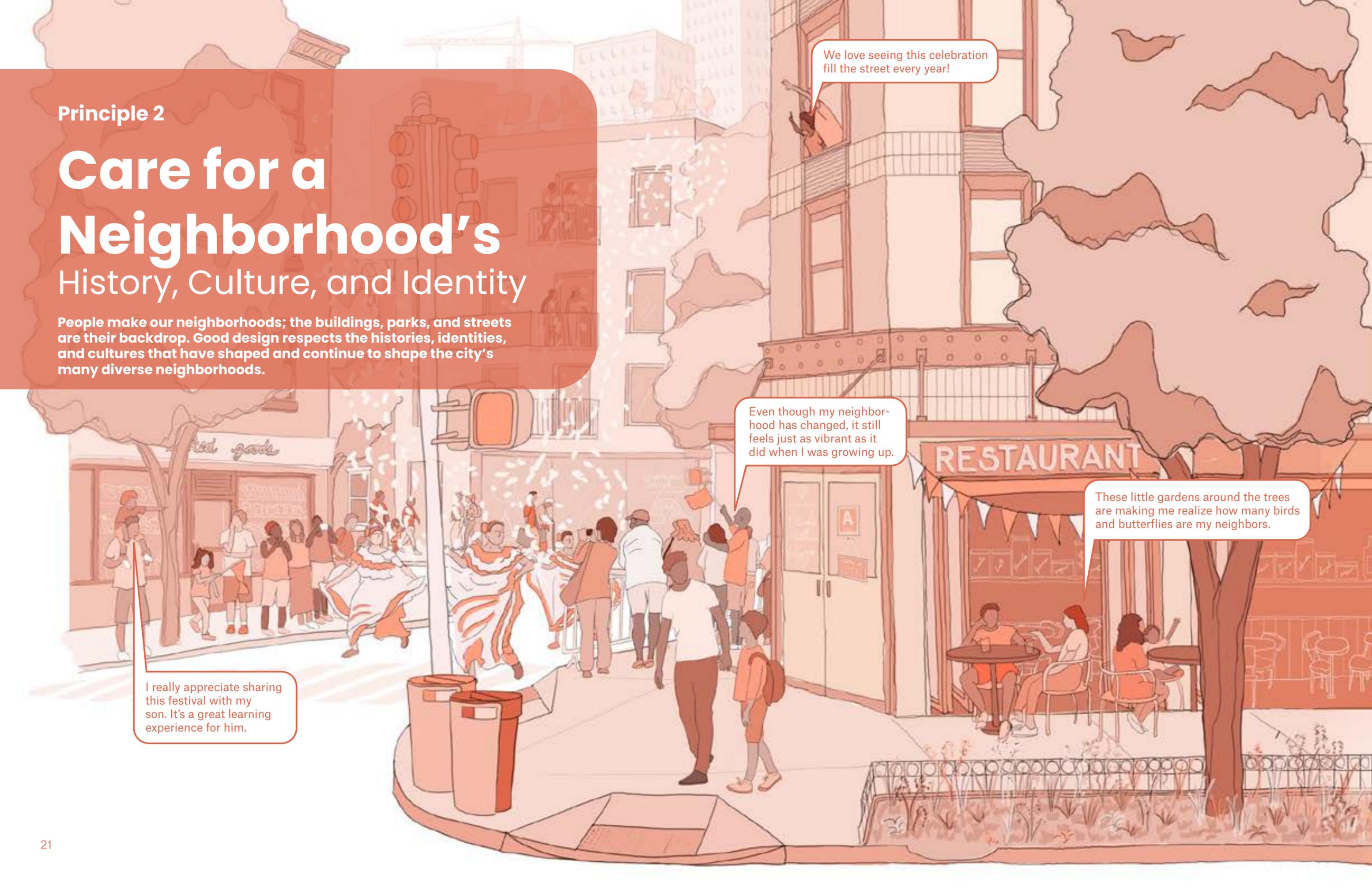
---

- Providing public space amenities, such as seating, planting, and lighting, that are attractive, comfortable, and encourage social interaction.
- Delivering long lasting, well-designed buildings that enhance neighborhood architecture and help improve quality of life within neighborhoods. (An example is featured on pages 39-40.)
- Prioritizing durable and sustainable materials in our buildings and public spaces to serve New Yorkers for generations.
- Considering maintenance needs in site design and materials. For example, using low-maintenance plants and locally-sourced building materials.

Principle 2

# Care for a Neighborhood's History, Culture, and Identity

People make our neighborhoods; the buildings, parks, and streets are their backdrop. Good design respects the histories, identities, and cultures that have shaped and continue to shape the city's many diverse neighborhoods.



I really appreciate sharing this festival with my son. It's a great learning experience for him.

We love seeing this celebration fill the street every year!

Even though my neighborhood has changed, it still feels just as vibrant as it did when I was growing up.

These little gardens around the trees are making me realize how many birds and butterflies are my neighbors.

# Objectives

These actions should be used to inform the design process and provide care for a neighborhood's history, culture, and identity.



## Community and Diversity

---

- Approaching urban design with the understanding that shaping neighborhoods must be a collaborative, open, and honest process.
- Communicating in plain language and meeting the needs of non-English speakers.
- Considering a neighborhood's history and collective knowledge to inform community needs and guide design decisions.
- Respecting that change can be uncomfortable, and being a patient and active listener during design discussions.
- Providing information, data, research, and tools that are easily accessible for people to shape their neighborhoods.



## Existing Networks and Uses

---

- Collaborating with neighborhood groups, institutions, and other local leaders to shape the design process and respond to community needs.
- Considering how people use their existing spaces to inform priorities and unlock opportunities through design.
- Incorporating established economic, cultural, religious, and festive activities into the design of buildings and public spaces.
- Providing flexible public and semi-public places (such as libraries, community centers, and markets) where communities feel comfortable expressing their cultural traditions.
- Synthesizing a wide variety of goals, whether they be from residents, property owners, elected officials, or more, to ensure different opinions are accounted for.



## Natural Features and Resources

---

- Looking for opportunities to re-integrate landscape within larger natural ecosystems by incorporating native species or materials into the design of public spaces.
- Designing spaces that celebrate seasonal change and can be enjoyed year-round.
- Encouraging greenery on rooftops, building facades, and other infrastructure to expand the biodiversity of NYC.
- Considering how the design of public spaces and buildings can mitigate exposure to air and noise pollution.
- Orienting new buildings and designing infrastructure in a way that maximizes access to natural light.



## Building Features and Form

---

- Creating relationships between buildings and public spaces by emphasizing the forms and rhythm of surrounding neighborhood blocks.
- Using materials, colors, and shapes that reflect their surroundings.
- Looking beyond the immediate boundaries of a lot to inform site programming and ensure a planned development complements neighborhood conditions.
- Designing quality city facilities to represent the pride, history, and ambition of communities.

### Principle 3

# Embrace the City's Dynamism

New York City is an unparalleled, dynamic, and vibrant world capital. Good urban design creates a welcoming environment that embraces the entrepreneurial spirit and rhythm that defines NYC.

Seeing something new every day is one of my favorite things about living here.

My daughter loves to ride her scooter to soccer practice, and I think it's fun too!

Did you know the Sunday market in that new building only sells produce and crafts made locally?

Let's head to that new waterfront park so you can run around with your friends!

# Objectives

These ambitions describe how good urban design can contribute to NYC's dynamic and vibrant spirit.



## Innovation and Creativity

---

- Reflecting NYC's wonder and delight with designs that give people a variety of experiences and vantage points. (An example is featured on page 35-36.)
- Promoting ambitious and thoughtful approaches to design, programming, and the environment—no matter the size or budget of the project.
- Utilizing new technologies (such as modular construction, *Passive House* design techniques, and advanced materials) to create better places for living and working.
- Recognizing creative local initiatives and collaborating with communities to develop responsive solutions.



## Flexibility and Variety

---

- Embracing a variety of architectural forms and details to provide people with a dynamic experience as they move through neighborhoods.
- Coordinating layers of activity in the design of buildings and open spaces to amplify public life.
- Creating indoor and outdoor spaces that are great not only in their own right, but also complement and draw people to NYC's network of public spaces.
- Designing places that are functional, beautiful, and comfortable throughout the seasons and across different times of the day and night.
- Promoting amenities and programs for everyone, including evening activities and one-off celebrations or events.



## Old and New

---

- Ensuring new developments strike a balance between embracing NYC's continual change and respect for the context of existing neighborhoods, so they can stand as unique places on their own.
- Collaborating with an alliance of local, public, and private interests to create inclusive places that support the old and embrace the new.
- Recognizing the design opportunities that engage the ebb and flow of movement that is characteristic of NYC.
- Adapting old buildings to meet current needs, ensuring NYC continues to thrive.



## Resourcefulness and Tenacity

---

- Contributing to NYC's enduring spirit of reinvention by learning from past challenges, adapting to change, and continually striving to create the best city we can.
- Welcoming new ideas, approaches, and technologies to solve problems and unlock opportunities for urban imagination.
- Identifying creative solutions when dealing with budget constraints by prioritizing design strategies that meet broader planning and policy goals.
- Negotiating thoughtful trade-offs between hyper local, borough, citywide, and regional initiatives.

Principle 4

# Confront Society's Greatest Challenges

New York City must secure its future against many challenges, from the climate crisis to social inequity. We must make design choices that help us build a safer, stronger, fairer, more resilient city for generations to come.



I went to a fun workshop last night and shared my ideas about the highway.

Wow, our energy bill is way down this month. We got lucky with that new community solar project next door!

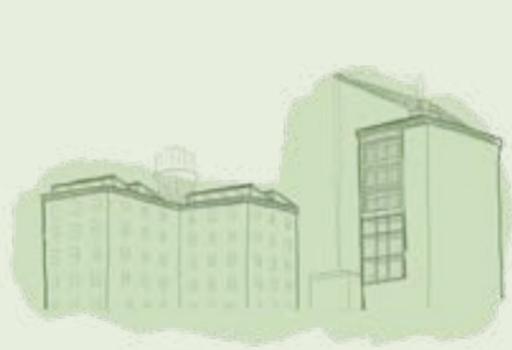
This beach is such a good place to teach my students how to respect one another and care for the environment.

My daily walk to the water really supports my mental health, and with the river cleaner than ever, I get to fish again!

There are so many more birds and butterflies since they finished this section of the park.

# Objectives

Good urban design is about problem solving. These actions can help us confront society's greatest challenges in a collective and responsible manner.



## Sustainability and Adaptability

---

- Forging an ambitious path toward a carbon neutral city, while protecting neighborhoods from the impacts of a changing climate.
- Looking for opportunities to incorporate signage and other features that share information about climate issues and goals.
- Going above and beyond code requirements to better prepare for the climate risks of today while creating a more resilient environment for the future.
- Identifying clear strategies that adapt open spaces to withstand climate risks, improve ecological habitats, and ensure people have access to cool spaces.



## Equity and Opportunity

---

- Striving for positive change by "co-designing" our neighborhoods.
- Designing alongside diverse, representational groups and community leaders to generate an inclusive vision for public spaces in any given neighborhood.
- Prioritizing restorative and reparative strategies, such as improving parks that have received less investment than others in the city. (An example is featured on pages 45-48.)
- Avoiding "hostile design"—or design features that discourage access, gathering, or rest—to create inclusive, comfortable, and welcoming spaces.



## Health and Well-being

---

- Designing to reduce noise and air pollution and mitigate urban heat.
- Making physical activities more available and enjoyable for people of all backgrounds and abilities.
- Encouraging people to maximize time in public spaces by designing interesting pathways with ample amenities.
- Being mindful of generational needs to ensure that all ages—from young children to seniors—are well connected to spaces that are comfortable and engaging.



## Diversity and Mutual Understanding

---

- Considering programs and spaces that facilitate social interaction and community decision-making.
- Encouraging programs and activities that enliven the neighborhood by welcoming residents and visitors of all races, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, and sexual orientations.
- Increasing the design quality of open spaces in all corners of the city to foster pride, encourage stewardship, and bring neighborhoods together.
- Creating or enhancing spaces that support social interaction and allow for a diverse array of cultural and artistic expressions.

# 3

## THE PRINCIPLES IN PLACE

Chapters 1 and 2 capture a thoughtful approach for how to think about and practice urban design. This chapter grounds *The Principles* in real-life places throughout the city. Each example reveals how project teams applied design strategies to achieve positive outcomes. The two project examples at the end of this chapter include further detail on how city agencies use *The Principles* throughout different stages of a planning and design process.

### Chapter Contents

- Design of a Public Space
- Design of a Waterfront Open Space
- Design of an Affordable Housing Building
- Design of a Large-scale Development
- Applied to a Neighborhood Plan

← Chestnut Commons - East New York, Brooklyn



# Design of a Public Space

## 550 Madison Garden

**Team:** Designed by Snohetta  
Developed + Managed by The Olayan Group  
**Location:** 550 Madison Avenue, Manhattan  
**Type:** Privately Owned Public Space (POPS)  
**Year:** 2023

550 Madison Garden is a renovated privately owned public space (POPS) in the heart of Midtown Manhattan. This project transformed a dark and enclosed public passageway into a public oasis for social gathering, cultural activities, and rest.

This POPS responds to the rising demands of public space to address many variables in a holistic and cohesive manner. The project demonstrates how *The Principles* complement each other by implementing context-responsive solutions and sustainable design strategies to enhance daily life in the area. The details below describe how this project's design improves urban vitality, public health and well-being, access to recreation, and how it addresses climate change.



↖ (Upper) Photo after construction; (Lower) Enclosed space before renovation    ↑ Photo from within the garden

### Principle 1 Enhance People's Daily Lives

- People are drawn into the space by large, open entryways and tiered green spaces.
- A variety of spaces and seating options accommodate diverse needs and interests.
- Services and amenities—such as gender-inclusive public restrooms, public Wi-Fi, an interactive fountain, food and beverage kiosks, and heated seating—create a comfortable space for all ages and backgrounds.
- The glass canopy structure provides shelter while maximizing daylight.
- The seating and paving materials are high quality, comfortable, attractive, and durable.

### Principle 2 Care for a Neighborhood's History, Culture, and Identity

- Lushly planted with native species, the garden blooms in different seasons to attract birds and pollinators and look inviting throughout the year.
- Circular elements and curvilinear forms throughout the garden complement the historic architectural significance of the 550 Madison Avenue landmark building and its iconic Chippendale pediment.
- Clear sight lines between E 55th and E 56th Street open up views to adjacent buildings and nearby landmarks.
- The garden design enhances Midtown's public space network by considering existing amenities and introducing new programming.

### Principle 3 Embrace the City's Dynamism

- The unique glass canopy invites visitors to discover a captivating hidden gem in the heart of Midtown.
- This contemporary public space uses careful material selection and design details to blend well with old buildings and public spaces, offering a great example of "old and new."
- The tiered landscape design creates hierarchy and topography within the space, an uncommon feature in most POPS—especially those in Midtown.

### Principle 4 Confront Society's Greatest Challenges

- The conversion from indoor to outdoor space reduced energy consumption as there is no longer a need for heating and air conditioning.
- The plaza now feels more inclusive due to clear openings on each block.
- Eco-friendly features such as the glass canopy—equipped with rainwater capture technology—sustainably irrigate planted areas, mitigate stormwater runoff, and reduce water consumption.
- Native plants promote biodiversity, reduce water usage, support local ecosystems, and support a healthy and attractive environment.

# Design of a Waterfront Open Space

## 300 Huntington Street

**Team:** Designed by SCAPE Landscape Architecture  
 Building Design by Dattner Architects + Berheimer Architecture  
 Developed by Monadnock Development

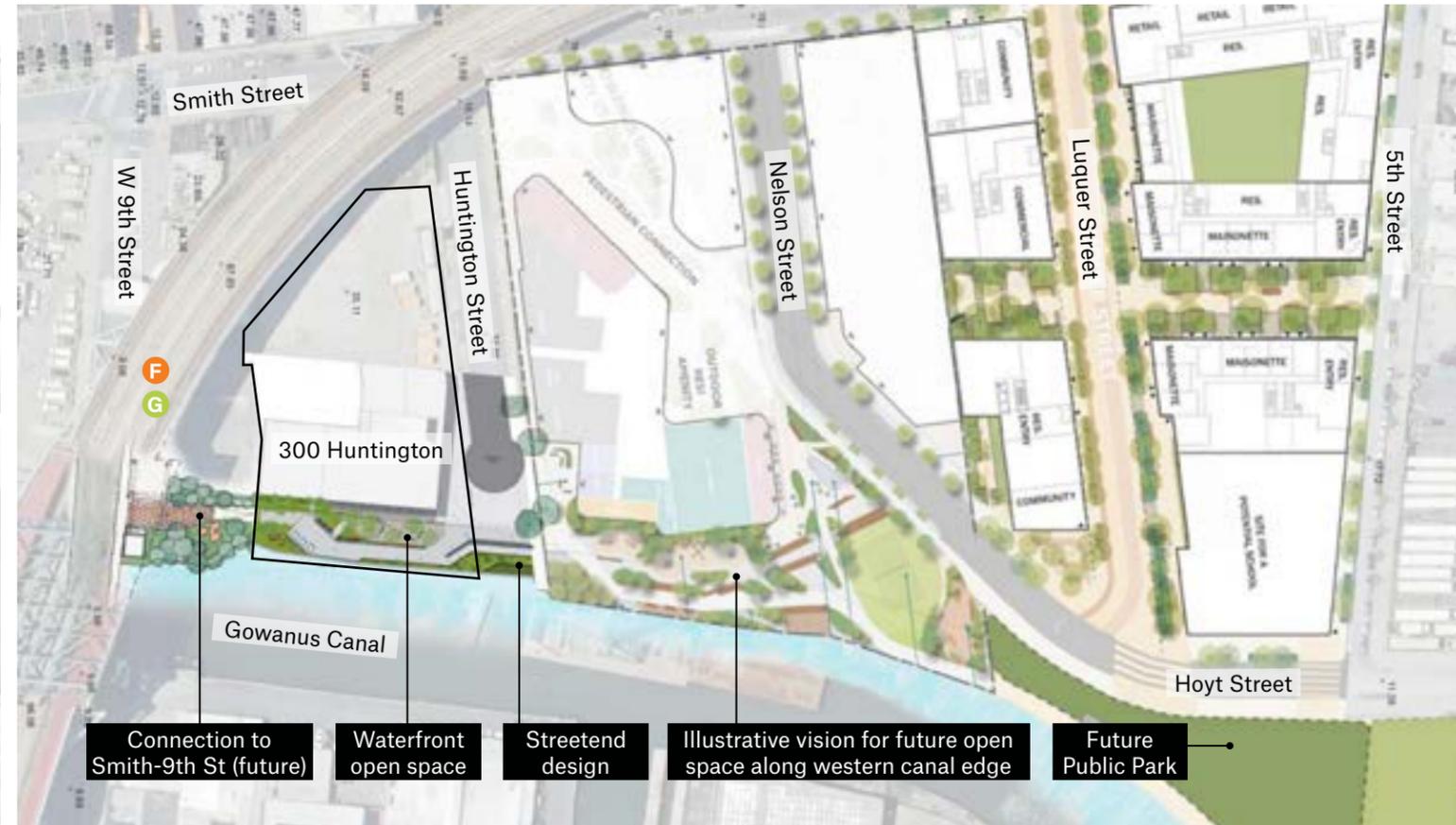
**Location:** 300 Huntington Street, Brooklyn

**Type:** Waterfront Public Access Area (WPAA)

**Year:** 2024

300 Huntington is a waterfront development along the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn. DCP required the property owner to provide a public open space, with plants and amenities, as part of the development. 300 Huntington's esplanade will connect to waterfront public access along the canal and will be directly accessible from the Smith-9th Street subway station and bus stops.

This project demonstrates a thoughtful urban design approach that builds upon the area's industrial history while accommodating the needs of a growing and evolving neighborhood. The addressed various environmental challenges, including remediation and flood risk. The strategies below showcase how this project is designed as an important gateway to existing and planned public spaces along the Gowanus waterfront.



↖ (Upper) Seating and planting along canal; (Lower) After construction    ↑ Vision plan for the Gowanus waterfront

### Principle 1 Enhance People's Daily Lives

- The open space orients visitors to a growing network of public spaces along the canal.
- The waterfront open space will improve public transit access by connecting the western side of the canal to Smith-9th Street.
- Continuity of the waterfront open space is maintained at the end of Huntington street—the vehicular turnaround is set back to give priority to pedestrian safety and connectivity.
- A variety of seating areas and social spaces are provided throughout the open space.
- Locally-sourced, durable materials are used in the open space and on the building exterior.

### Principle 2 Care for a Neighborhood's History, Culture, and Identity

- The development team addressed community priorities that were highlighted during City-led workshops and visioning sessions.
- Site programming fosters a mixed-use neighborhood by creating job space near transit.
- The waterfront open space is flood-adaptive and includes flexible space for different programming, addressing primary community requests.
- The building massing has been arranged to acknowledge its adjacency to elevated rail and the canal. Its materials are consistent with the surroundings.

### Principle 3 Embrace the City's Dynamism

- Large storefront windows on the ground floor make the space welcoming and visible. This unifies indoor and outdoor areas, increasing activity during different times of day and improving perceptions of safety.
- The building accommodates diverse uses, such as offices, retail, and an industrial workshop.
- The materials used in the landscape design reflect Gowanus' industrial history, such as the guardrail and canopy structure.
- Strategies to optimize and expand soil volume were used to promote the growth and long-term health of shade trees that will be integral for ensuring comfort in the space.

### Principle 4 Confront Society's Greatest Challenges

- The building's non-residential uses will bring a variety of people to the waterfront open space, providing more opportunities for social interaction along the canal.
- Stormwater management techniques, including rooftop, open space, and street treatments, reduced the site's stormwater runoff.
- A variety of native and aquatic plants enhance biodiversity, flood resiliency, and local ecosystems.

# Design of an Affordable Housing Building

## Cyrus House

**Team:** Designed by Curtis + Ginsberg Architects  
Developed by Bronx Pro Group  
**Location:** 4697 Third Avenue, Bronx, New York  
**Type:** Disposition of city-owned property to facilitate affordable housing development.  
**Year:** 2023

*Cyrus House* is a residential building along Third Avenue in the Bronx with 53 apartments and a commercial ground floor. It was built on a site that previously sat vacant for over five years and was used as an NYPD parking lot before that. This project is a good example of how the City partners with the private sector to build more housing in the neighborhoods that are well-connected to transit. This building is designed to the highest energy efficiency standards and adds a new architectural flavor to Third Avenue.

This project demonstrates multiple interactions between *The Principles*. The innovative and creative design strategies make this building an exceptional and distinctive place. Its presence and visibility make Third Avenue a safer place for people living and working in the community. Furthermore, the architectural quality and sustainable design details allow this project to inspire civic pride and creativity along the Third Avenue corridor.



Photo © Alexander Severin

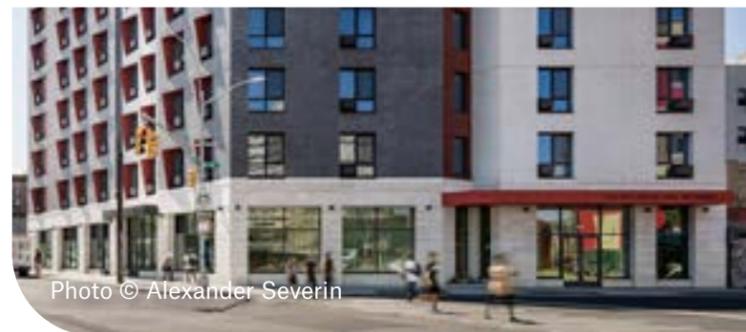


Photo © Alexander Severin



Photo © Alexander Severin

↖ (Upper) Viewed from across Third Ave; (Lower) Active ground floor    ↑ Adjacency to neighborhood services

### Principle 1 Enhance People's Daily Lives

- The building is near a major transit hub and the area is well-served by a variety of transit options. Because tenants do not have to rely solely on cars, the building space can prioritize homes over parking spaces.
- The building's location provides convenient, walkable access to green spaces, schools, and essential retail services.
- Residents have access to convenient amenities such as shared laundry facilities, bicycle storage, a gym, and an outdoor courtyard.
- Windows along all sides of the building maximize residents' natural light.
- Durable and readily available building materials were used to ensure long-term viability.

### Principle 2 Care for a Neighborhood's History, Culture, and Identity

- The project brings new affordable housing to the neighborhood and offers a variety of apartment sizes.
- The building's dynamic form responds to the site's highly visible location and its size complements nearby buildings.
- The project comes from a neighborhood-based developer with knowledge of local conditions and community needs.
- The sculptural windows create visual interest and add to the neighborhood's architectural variety.

### Principle 3 Embrace the City's Dynamism

- The building helps reorient Third Avenue as a vibrant, residential and industrial, mixed-use corridor.
- New technologies were used to create an insulated thermal "shell" that allows the building to lower energy use, improve indoor comfort, and reduce noise.
- The project supports citywide priorities: adding more affordable homes near transit and reducing the carbon footprint of buildings.
- The commercial space on the ground floor can increase sidewalk activity and enhance the pedestrian experience.

### Principle 4 Confront Society's Greatest Challenges

- The project goes above and beyond code requirements, achieving *Passive House* certification for optimizing natural heating and cooling techniques.
- Apartments come with energy-efficient appliances and air conditioning.
- Solar panels and an energy recovery system reduce fuel consumption.
- The building design encourages health and well-being by providing naturally-lit stairways, an outdoor garden, superior indoor air quality systems, and fitness equipment.

# Design of a Large-scale Development

## Sendero Verde

**Team:** Designed by Handel Architects  
Landscape Design by AECOM  
Developed by L+M Development Partners, Jonathan Rose Companies, and Acacia Network

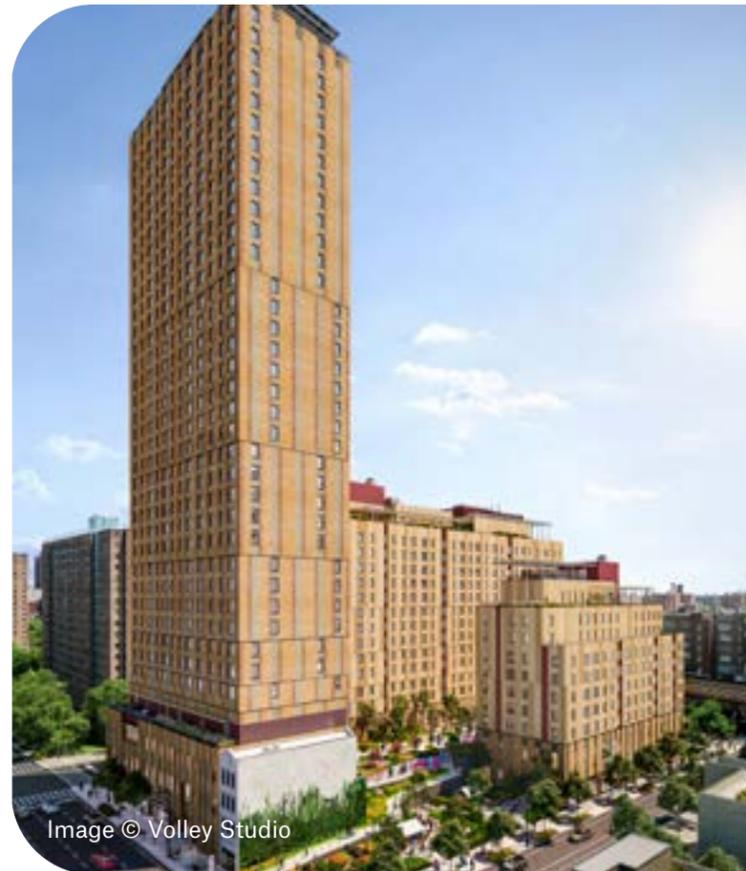
**Location:** 60 East 112th Street, New York, New York

**Type:** Neighborhood rezoning and disposition of city-owned property for affordable housing

**Year:** Ongoing

Sendero Verde is a mixed-use, multi-building development in East Harlem that is being constructed on a large lot previously owned by the City. NYC Housing and Preservation Development (HPD) undertook a dynamic planning and design process that involved neighborhood groups, community leaders, multiple city agencies, private sector design teams, and multiple developers. Many voices informed the design and uses of the buildings and open space. The relationship between this process and good design principles is further explained on the following pages.

This case study showcases urban design strategies that should be a reference for other multi-building projects under consideration. The development demonstrates how diverse, community-driven programming and thoughtful design coordination between indoor and outdoor spaces is foundational to all four principles.



↖ Architectural rendering    ↗ An overhead illustrative plan of the courtyard, meandering path and gardens

### Principle 1 Enhance People's Daily Lives

- The buildings include homes and jobs within a short walk from multiple subway lines and a regional Metro-North station.
- The site will feature a school, community center, and healthcare services to provide convenience for residents and activate the buildings at all times of day.
- Open areas at each end of the public courtyard provide an alternative route between Madison and Park Avenues.
- Building entrances open directly to the courtyard, which improves visibility and enhances safety.
- Play spaces, community gardens, outdoor exercise areas, and meditation spaces encourage cross-generational socializing.

### Principle 2 Care for a Neighborhood's History, Culture, and Identity

- A community visioning workshop was conducted to gather local input and priorities before developing the site plan.
- The building arrangement maximizes sunlight hours on community gardens and other open spaces, in response to a public priority.
- The courtyard builds on East Harlem's open space network, offering a moment to rest.
- The landscape design and meandering path mimic the form of a historic Lenape trail that once existed on the site.
- The building material and detailed brickwork complement other buildings in East Harlem.

### Principle 3 Embrace the City's Dynamism

- Collaboration between the public sector, community, and private development teams resulted in a site plan that integrates multiple layers of programming and services.
- The development attracts residents, students, workers of various professions, and visitors, adding energy and new experiences to the neighborhood.
- Important work of local groups—such as Union Settlement—is recognized by including space for their services in new buildings.
- The elevated courtyard adds a unique type of public space to the neighborhood.
- 100% of residential units in each building are income-regulated and rent-controlled, increasing community access to affordable housing.

### Principle 4 Confront Society's Greatest Challenges

- The north building is the world's largest fully affordable *Passive House*-certified building. The building's thermal envelope, energy recovery system, all-electric systems, and on-site power generation reduce its carbon footprint and support better indoor air quality.
- "Co-designing" led to a more inclusive and representative inventory of community needs and a vision for adapting the site to meet local demands.
- Diverse indoor and outdoor programming encourages interaction across generations and social backgrounds.
- The courtyard features a performance space suitable for events that celebrate diversity and inclusivity.

## Co-designing Sendero Verde

Sendero Verde demonstrates how *The Principles* should influence each phase of a planning and design process.

### Community Visioning Workshop

This project was ignited from energetic conversations and debate among nearby residents, community gardeners, people who work in East Harlem, and other local constituents. During the visioning workshop, people gathered in groups to discuss their ideas for the future of this city-owned site. They spoke about community needs, such as deeply affordable housing, a healthier environment, space for social interactions, and support for small businesses and local organizations. Urban designers from city agencies joined each table to visually represent these ideas through hand-drawn diagrams, 3D sketches and notes on poster-size flip charts.

### Setting Urban Design Priorities

Over 100 community members shared their opinions during the visioning workshop, which was supplemented by additional feedback from focused sessions with neighborhood groups. NYC Parks' GreenThumb unit conducted a thorough evaluation of existing community gardens, taking note of each garden's key features, spatial requirements, and existing shadow patterns. City agencies combined community feedback with this site analysis and other neighborhood research to establish other urban design priorities. This included identifying preferred locations for new public open space, determining how to shape buildings around that open space and along adjacent streets, and how to enhance connections between indoor and outdoor spaces.

### Request for Proposals (RFP) Announcement

The City used an RFP to solicit proposals from private sector development teams. RFPs explain the scope and vision for a project and provide information about the existing site, preferred qualifications of design and development teams, and requirements for proposal submissions. As part of the SustainNYC RFP for this site, city agencies translated community feedback and site planning priorities into specific design

guidelines. These guidelines focused on how a future development should be experienced from the perspective of a person on the sidewalk. They provided strategies for improving neighborhood connectivity, enhancing safety, strengthening social interaction, designing for environmental performance, and identifying how architecture should respond to the context.

### Request for Proposals (RFP) Evaluation and Selection

The design guidelines were an essential part of the metrics used to evaluate site development proposals. The RFP heavily weighted the 'Architecture and Urban Design' section of the selection criteria. The selection committee referred to the RFP's design guidelines to judge this section, taking into account how each proposal articulated strategies that responded to the design guidelines. This example highlights why it's necessary to have structured core values and principles that can guide decision-making. They ensure that processes are efficient, impartial, and effective in producing optimal outcomes.

### Detailed Design Review

This project is a great example of how good design can be maintained throughout the course of a project. After a development team's proposal was selected, there was ongoing collaboration between the public and private sectors. While the design guidelines ensured that important architecture and urban design goals were incorporated into the initial design, continued involvement from urban designers was critical. Projects deal with many factors that can compromise design quality, such as budget constraints, regulatory challenges, and maintenance issues. To address this, the city agencies that wrote the design guidelines met regularly with the development team to provide design feedback and develop creative solutions for maintaining high quality design. This also ensured that the project stayed true to the core vision.

1. Photos taken during the visioning workshop where City agencies recorded community priorities.
2. Courtyard renderings that illustrate a variety of spaces that are meant to bring different people together.



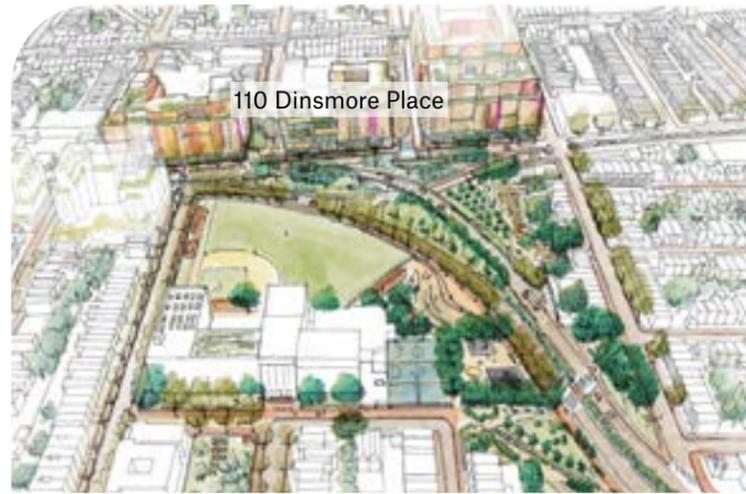
# Applied to a Neighborhood Plan

## East New York Neighborhood Plan

**Team:** City agencies (led by DCP, HPD, and EDC)  
**Location:** East New York, Cypress Hill and Ocean Hill  
**Type:** Neighborhood Plan  
**Year:** 2011-2013: Sustainable Communities East New York study  
 2014-2016: Outreach and planning process  
 2016: Plan and rezoning approved  
 2016-current: Implementation

A city-led neighborhood plan provides an opportunity for communities and stakeholders to work collaboratively with city agencies and elected officials to shape a long-term vision that includes identifying land use changes and capital investments for a particular area. The East New York Neighborhood Plan focused on strategies to increase housing opportunity, encourage economic development, and strategically use City investment to bring new community services and improve public spaces. During the plan's formation, urban design was crucial in demonstrating how specific design strategies could be layered and connected to neighborhood goals.

This project required thinking across different physical scales, considering many community interests and ideas, and working with others to develop realistic pathways for implementation. The following details provide a clear picture of how *The Principles* can transform and enhance the look, feel, and functionality of a neighborhood to make it safer, convenient and more attractive for everyone.



↖ Re-envisioned parks and potential new buildings    ↑ Analytical drawing of existing neighborhood assets

### Principle 1 Enhance People's Daily Lives

- New buildings on main corridors are now permitted through the zoning code to build housing but are required to activate their ground floor with shops, community facilities, and other non-residential uses that will further enhance the pedestrian experience.
- Improvements such as new trees, curb extensions, and pedestrian refuge islands on Atlantic Avenue have made it safer and more enjoyable to walk in the neighborhood.
- Neighborhood parks and playgrounds have been upgraded and transformed near existing housing and new housing that was built as a result of zoning changes.

### Principle 2 Care for a Neighborhood's History, Culture, and Identity

- The neighborhood planning process was designed to engage all local communities by providing outreach in multiple languages and holding all events within the neighborhood.
- The multi-agency project team mapped existing local assets (sketched in the map above) with community input, gaining insight on how people use different spaces. Through this process the team identified opportunities for improving the access to and quality of those assets.
- Strategies for protecting and enhancing the industrial business zone were developed through targeted outreach to local industrial businesses.
- The team analyzed land use and mobility patterns to develop zoning changes that have led to new housing near public transit, quality open spaces, schools, and neighborhood services.

### Principle 3 Embrace the City's Dynamism

- NYC Parks' *Schoolyards-to-Playgrounds* program converted schoolyards into multi-use spaces, expanding the public space network.
- New developments have been good neighbors by addressing community needs such as new schools, shopping opportunities, and space for existing businesses.
- The former courthouse at 127 Pennsylvania Ave. was rehabilitated to an NYPD community youth center, showcasing how buildings can be adapted to meet community needs.
- The plan demonstrated how "infill buildings," or new buildings on underused space, could support a neighborhood that feels more inviting, lively, and safe.

### Principle 4 Confront Society's Greatest Challenges

- The project team held visioning workshops where community members shaped priorities for site improvement and redesign of various spaces under city ownership.
- The civic engagement strategy enabled emerging immigrant groups, such as a Bengali community, to express priorities in their own language.
- The plan identified both physical and non-physical strategies to repair disinvestment and discriminatory practices, such as housing rehabilitation loans and new schools.
- Reinvestment in parks, wayfinding improvements, and safer streets have invited neighbors to walk and enjoy their time in public space.

## Urban Design in East New York

The East New York Neighborhood Plan was the result of collaboration between the community, professionals, and city planners, along with commitments from city agencies and elected officials. The plan encompassed several components including land use changes through a rezoning, preservation and creation of affordable housing, funding for new schools, public open space improvements, a new community center, and programs to strengthen the local economy and workforce. This project serves as an example of how to shape neighborhood plans by using *The Principles* throughout the planning process.

### Community Engagement

The neighborhood plan was created with residents, local organizations, elected officials, and various city agencies. This collaborative process allowed urban designers to listen and learn from these local experts while communicating how good urban design can enhance people's daily lives. Urban designers shared visual diagrams, drawings, and presentations at public events, and acted as facilitators and visual notetakers during roundtable discussions. Results from public outreach informed the following design opportunities:

- Ways to arrange and program new buildings on city-owned lots
- Strategies to bolster activity on key corridors
- Ways to enhance neighborhood connectivity
- Strategies to improve the quality of existing parks, playgrounds, schoolyards, and streets

### Asset Mapping and Analysis

DCP visited the study area to record observations, take measurements of public spaces, streets and buildings, and capture the neighborhood's character through hand-drawn sketches (such as the drawing on page 46). This documentation was supplemented with desktop research and mapping to complete an existing conditions assessment of the neighborhood.

### Neighborhood Framework Plan

The framework plan outlined opportunities raised through community engagement and neighborhood research. It identified strategies for land use changes that distinguished different approaches for main corridors versus interior residential blocks. The plan also highlighted corridors that could improve neighborhood

connectivity, areas to enhance or create open space, and sites that could be leveraged for future community resources. The framework plan is an example of how all four *Principles* work together to create a robust vision for the future.

### Modeling and Drawing

Many factors and variables are weighed when considering changes to zoning districts. Urban designers have the critical responsibility of visualizing what can be built under a zoning proposal. To achieve this, designers use 3D modeling software to create various building forms that are analyzed from the viewpoint of a person on the sidewalk. During this phase, different zoning districts were tested to compare the visual and environmental impacts between different densities. This helped justify and ground the zoning proposal. You can find examples of these models in the Urban Design and Visual Resources chapter of the East New York Neighborhood Plan's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

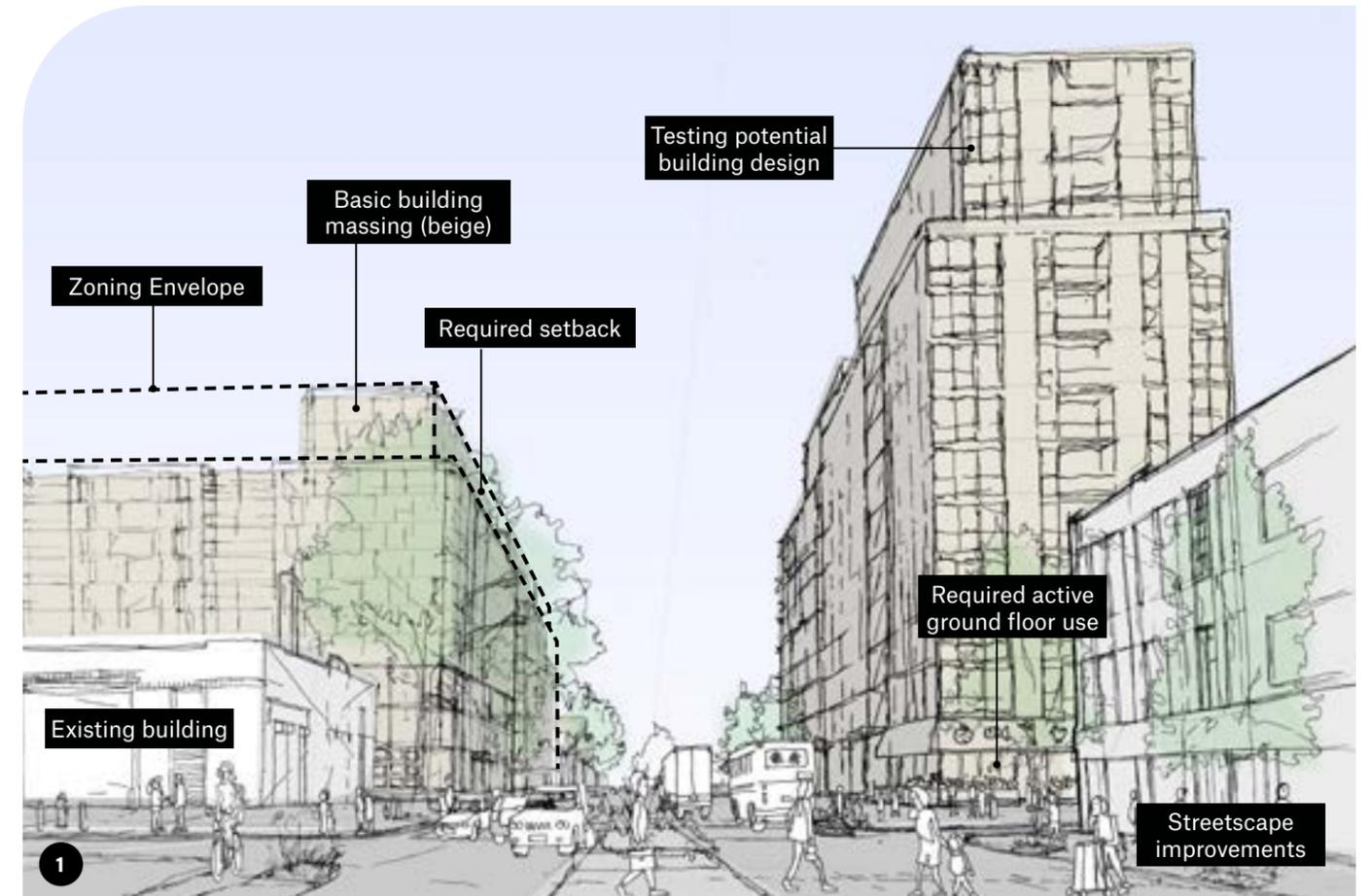
In some locations within the study area, additional information was hand drawn and layered atop the 3D models. This included sidewalk and open space improvements, in addition to specific zoning controls such as setbacks, requirements for how ground floors can be used, and more. These drawings were critical for capturing how people would experience future conditions as they move through the neighborhood. (Refer to the top image on page 48 for an example.)

### Assessing the Outcomes

During the public review process, rezoning proposals are considered for six months before a vote by the City Council. If a rezoning is approved, new buildings are required to adhere to updated zoning from the date of passage. For East New York, this was April 2016.

Since then, several new buildings have been built within rezoned areas (see the 2021 progress update and the bottom right photos on page 52). This offers an opportunity for urban designers to evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of the zoning regulations. Post-construction site visits are important to *The Principles* as they keep us current with development trends and identify design strategies that are proving to create places where people feel safe, comfortable, and welcome.

1. Sketch of potential buildings along Atlantic Avenue
2. Co-designing workshop for Dinsmore Chestnut site
3. Comparing analytical EIS model vs. what was built
4. Callahan-Kelly Playground after renovation
5. Completed building at 50 Pennsylvania Ave





# 4

## RESOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This chapter includes resources and key terms to ensure you get the most out of this guidebook and understand the avenues to apply your urban design knowledge. Towards the end of the chapter, you will find references that can further expand your learning about urban design in NYC.

### Chapter Contents

- Getting Involved in a Project
- Key Terms
- Want to Explore a Topic Further?
- How Were *The Principles* Decided On?
- Acknowledgments

← East 28th St and 5th Ave intersection - Manhattan

# Getting Involved in a Project

Do you want to take action and help shape the future of your neighborhood? Use this guide to determine how to get involved in various projects.

# 1

## Determine the STATUS

Is the project currently being built or still in planning?

- Search the Building on My Block website.
- Search the DOB NOW portal.
- Visit the site. Is there construction fencing along the sidewalk? Look for a "work in progress" sign—these contain helpful information about projects that are under construction.
- Find your Community District and consult your Community Board website for more information.

**Yes! This project is in the Planning Phase.**  
See Step 2.

**No! This project is Under Construction.<sup>1</sup>**

Contact your DOB Borough Office.

# 2

## Understand the SCOPE

Does the project involve land use changes?

- Search for the project on the City's Zoning Application Portal (searchable by address, borough/block/lot, or on interactive map).
- Visit DCP's website and search the Initiatives page for more information.

**Yes! This is a Land use change.**  
See Step 3.

**No! This is not a Land use change.**

Find the lead city agency or identify the commission<sup>2</sup> that votes on the project.

- For projects in a historic building or district, visit the Landmarks Preservation Commission.
- Is the project on city-owned land? Check with the Public Design Commission.
- Visit the Department of Transportation website for Current Projects.
- Check the NYC Parks website for open space initiatives.

# 3

## Find the SCHEDULE

Is this project currently in the public review process?

- Check the project schedule<sup>3</sup> on the Zoning Application Portal and search under "Milestones" for upcoming events.
- Visit DCP's website and search the Initiatives page for more information.

**No! It is not in public review.**

**Yes, Public review is in progress.**

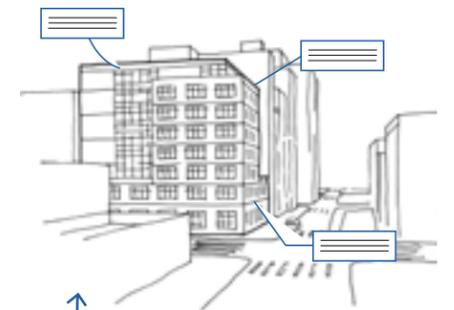
Attend a public meeting.

- Visit NYC Engage for upcoming events.

Contact your Community Board District Manager, Council Member's Office or DCP Borough Office to get involved.

## Speak Up!

- How do I come prepared to outreach events or public hearings?
- Join the project's City Planning Commission Review Session or view the recording at DCP's YouTube channel.
  - Use the Zoning Application Portal to view project details and understand which actions are up for a vote.
  - Visit the Community Board website (or project website) for information on specific project details.
  - Use language and visuals from this guidebook to advocate for good design!



Refer back to pages 7-8 for conversation prompts on how to talk about the design of a project undergoing public review.

1. Since 2010, approximately 90% of NYC construction on privately-owned land has not required city approval.  
2. Landmarks Preservation Commission, Public Design Commission, the Board of Standards and Appeals, Community Boards, and Borough Presidents host public hearings.

3. For projects marked "Completed," use the ULURP number to search for recorded City Planning Commission review sessions and City Planning Commission reports.

## Key Terms

### Access

The ability to make use of amenities and resources, such as grocery stores, pharmacies or schools, often within an easily traveled distance from where a person lives or works.

### Accessibility (Universal Design)

In this case, refers to how friendly and inviting an area is for people of all ages, physical abilities, and social identities to move around safely and easily. This is often referred to as “universal design.”

Accessibility (neighborhood) is measured by the distance and time it takes someone to go from one location to another. When routes are direct and one is able to experience a varied and dynamic built environment, people are often willing to move for longer distances.

### As-of-right Development

The Zoning Resolution governs what property owners can build on their land. When property owners or development teams follow all zoning regulations, they are pursuing what is called an “as-of-right” development. These projects involve a limited number of City approvals and do not go through a public review process.

### Built Environment

The human-made structures that we live, work, and play in, ranging from buildings and infrastructure to parks and green spaces.

### Civic Pride

The feeling of satisfaction and belonging in connection to a location. It is pride in your city, neighborhood and/or community.

### Co-designing

Bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders—in the form of

advisory groups, steering committees, or community working groups—to participate directly in problem solving, consensus building, and identification of planning and design solutions.

### Culturally Responsive Design

Involves incorporating and respecting the cultural values, practices, and preferences of diverse racial and ethnic communities in the design of the built environment.

### Discretionary Action

An action requiring approval from either the City Planning Commission (CPC) or the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA). Urban designers at the Department of City Planning are often involved in projects with a discretionary action. They provide design review and help shape a proposal before it is put in front of the CPC. Many projects with discretionary actions are subject to the uniform land use review procedure ULURP (defined on page 55).

### Diversity

The presence of a wide range of demographic, cultural, and social groups within the design process and the physical product(s) of a place.

### Equity

The just distribution of resources, opportunities, and benefits within a place, taking into account the varying needs and circumstances of its residents. Equity accounts for systemic inequities and differences in conditions while using corrective measures to ensure fairness and access.

Racial equity is a process of actively identifying and dismantling discriminatory practices, addressing racially biased policies, and ensuring



↑ Pedestrian perspective (the point of view from a person as they move down street)

that the benefits and opportunities of urban development are shared among all racial groups.

### Inclusion

Intentional and proactive efforts to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, feel welcomed, respected, and able to participate fully in the life of the city.

### Hostile Design

The use of design or policy to intentionally exclude or hinder human use of a space, restrict access to amenities, and limit freedom of movement through the city. Hostile design systematically discriminates against particular groups while benefiting others.

### Massing

Refers to building form and is often broken into three sections: base, middle and top. It defines both the interior space and the exterior shape of the building.

### Land Use

The activity, occupation, business, or operation that is conducted in a building or on a tract of land. Common categories of land uses include residential, commercial, industrial, or institutional uses.

### Pedestrian Perspective

The point of view or experience at eye level of a person as they move through the city's neighborhoods. Urban designers focus on the pedestrian perspective when evaluating any aspect of a project or when designing a building, plaza, or any other element of the public realm. See images on pages 54 and 55 for examples of this viewpoint.

### Principles of Good Urban Design

A set of values and goals that inform how we approach the design of NYC—its building, open spaces, and other aspects of the built environment.



↑ Pedestrian perspective (the point of view from a person as they look across street)

### Public Open Space

Areas that are open to the public to use, such as streets and public parks.

### Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP)

A roughly 7-month process for the public and the City to review and make decisions about proposed changes to zoning or other regulations governing the use of land in NYC. The public has the opportunity to share their input on projects by participating at hearings at the Community Board, Borough Board and Borough President levels, as well as at the City Planning Commission (CPC) and City Council.

### Public Realm

The spaces and experiences that members of the public share within the built environment. For example, our streets, parks, and plazas are part of the public realm. The public realm is also shaped by adjacent buildings. This is highlighted on page 56.

### Redlining

The discriminatory practice of denying financial services to residents of certain areas based on their race or ethnicity. The term refers to the red color used to denote "undesirable" areas on maps used by lending institutions to determine loan eligibility.

### Sense of Belonging

The feeling of connectedness to a place or community. This is important because if we feel recognized and connected to the place where we live, work, and play, we feel more at ease and can thrive within that environment. It's through a sense of belonging that our built environment can improve our well-being and quality of life.

### Sense of Scale

Scale refers to how elements of the city relate to one another in size or dimension and to how a pedestrian experiences them.



↑ The public realm includes streets, transit, plazas, parks, and many other shared spaces

### Urban Design

Urban design focuses on how the elements of our city, buildings, streets, parks, and plazas are designed, built, and arranged in relation to one another, and how people experience the city.

### Urban Planning

Urban planning looks at how features of the city, such as buildings, transportation and infrastructure, open space, housing, and public buildings, connect and relate to one another to shape regulations and investments to promote the health, safety, and economic well-being of the city's residents, workers, and businesses. Planning discussions combine the technical planning practice with the unique needs of our communities. Planners, who may work for government agencies, private entities, nonprofit organizations, or as volunteers, collaborate with communities, other public agencies,

and elected officials, to define and address the unique needs, aspirations, and cultures of NYC neighborhoods and their residents.

### Well-being

The degree to which people feel their physical, emotional and social needs are met. It includes all aspects of community life that have a direct influence on the physical and mental health of its members and the quality of the environment around them.

### Zoning

Laws that regulate the types of uses (for example, residential or commercial) that can be located on a given piece of land, as well as the overall shape and size of buildings. New York City's zoning regulations are established in the Zoning Resolution.

## Want to Explore a Topic Further?

The following links are resources from a variety of city agencies and urban design advocates that provide more in-depth detail for designing different types of spaces or understanding more about the planning and design process.

### Streets and Open Space

- [NYC Street Design Manual](#)
- [NYC Pedestrian Mobility Plan](#)
- [Curb Management Action Plan](#)
- [Dining Out NYC \(Sidewalk and Roadway Cafe Setup Guides\)](#)
- [Designing New York: Streetscapes for Wellness](#)
- [Designing New York: Prefabrication in the Public Realm](#)
- [Active Design Guidelines: Promoting Physical Activity and Health In Design](#)
- [Active Design: Shaping the Sidewalk Experience](#)
- [Safe Places, Active Spaces: A Community Playbook for Transforming Public Spaces in Your Neighborhood](#)
- [School Streets Toolkit: Every child deserves space to Play, Learn, and Grow](#)

### Housing and Campus Design

- [HPD Design Guidelines for New Construction](#)
- [Connected Communities Guidebook: A practical guide for community engagement, open space design, and building preservation and construction on NYCHA Campuses](#)
- [Designing New York: Quality Affordable Housing](#)

### Sustainability and Adaptability

- [Native Species Planting Guide for NYC](#)
- [Design and Planning for Flood Resiliency: Guidelines for NYC Parks](#)
- [NYC Climate Resiliency Design Guidelines](#)
- [Retrofitting Buildings for Flood Risk](#)
- [PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done](#)
- [Zero Waste Design Guidelines](#)

### Neighborhood Planning

- [New New York: Making New York Work for Everyone](#)
- [Neighborhood Planning Playbook: Housing New York](#)
- [Commercial District Needs Assessments](#)
- [Community District Profiles](#)

### Inclusive Design

- [Inclusive Design Guidelines: New York City](#)
- [Universal Design New York](#)

## How Were *The Principles* Decided On?

NYC's *Principles of Good Urban Design* were first released in 2017 to guide the city, community members, and everyone working towards promoting the livability and vitality of our neighborhoods and the public realm. Those principles were used to improve design and planning outcomes in DCP's work on land use applications. In 2020, DCP began to consider how *The Principles of Good Urban Design* could be used and implemented by all New Yorkers and adapted to address the evolving nature of our city's current reality, including the pandemic, racial justice efforts, the city's economy, and the mental health crisis. As a result, we embarked on a multi-year engagement process to update *The Principles of Good Urban Design*.

DCP structured the engagement process to reach a broad swath of New Yorkers and hear what urban design means to them. We set up a variety of forums to hear feedback from the following groups: members of the public, design and planning professionals, the government, and developers. This process began with a website ([goodurbandesign.nyc](http://goodurbandesign.nyc)) that hosted the video **What Is Urban Design?** and a survey about the 2017 Principles. We received over 1,500 responses—from Staten Island to City Island. The recurring themes included physical safety, beautifying the neighborhood, providing convenient connections to public services, and complementing the surrounding neighborhood.

In addition, we participated in Community Board meetings, presented to all five Borough Boards, and participated in pop-up events. DCP held workshops with architects and designers to better understand how they incorporate core values in their work. In addition, we convened roundtable discussions with developers to understand how they approach urban design.

This guidebook responds to this engagement by:

- Re-framing *The Principles* and underpinning them with clear objectives that can be applied in any NYC neighborhood.
- Providing prompts that can be used when evaluating a project.
- Including real-world examples to ground *The Principles* and share concrete ways for how good urban design can be achieved both in product and process.
- Sharing a roadmap of how to get involved in different planning and design projects.

NYC's *Principles of Good Urban Design* is a living document, one that must be revisited and refined to meet the moment. *The Principles* will always begin from the same starting point of people, their experience of the city, and how we can collectively make NYC a well-designed city for everyone.

## Acknowledgments

*The Principles for Good Urban Design* guidebook was shaped by numerous conversations with community leaders, design advocates, non-profit organizations, design practitioners, city-agency leaders, and the City Planning Commission. DCP greatly appreciates their contributions, time, and insights throughout an extensive engagement process.

### NYC Department of City Planning

Dan Garodnick, Director and Chair of the City Planning Commission

Edith Hsu-Chen, Executive Director

Laura Smith, Deputy Executive Director for Strategic Planning

### Principles of Good Urban Design Guidebook

Erick Gregory, Chief Urban Designer & Director of Urban Design

Sagi Golan, Deputy Director of Urban Design

Ryan Jacobson, Senior Lead Urban Designer

Alexandra Paty-Diaz, Deputy Director, Bronx Office

Joshua Simoneau, Senior Lead Urban Designer

Jackie Strawbridge, Creative Content and Editorial Manager

Galina Novikova, Urban Designer

Gary Chung, Associate Urban Designer

### Contributing DCP Staff

Chau Tran, Associate Urban Designer

Claudia Castillo De La Cruz, Associate Urban Designer

Crystal Jane Eksi, Senior Urban Designer

Sarah Lohmar, DCP Fellow

Jonathan Patkowski, Director of Communications

Casey Berkovitz, Press Secretary

Joe Marvilli, Deputy Press Secretary

Lara Merida, Senior Director of Community Planning and Engagement

Elizabeth Hamby, Director of Civic Engagement

Connie Chan, Assistant Director of Civic Engagement

Winston Von Engel, Senior Advisor

Stephane Pierre, Associate Transportation Planner

Annisha Davis, Engagement and Pipeline Studies Specialist

Kenismael Santiago-Pagan, Urban Designer, Bronx Office

Stephen Everett, Director of Planning Support

### Special Thanks

To the New Yorkers who shared their comments and ideas across all our engagement efforts. Your input has been the foundation for *The Principles* and this guidebook.

To DCP Alumni—Eugenia Di Girolamo, Jorge Hernandez, Justin Lamorella, Sarit Platkin, Julien Sneck, and Nneka Sobers—for your vision and collaborative spirit in creating the engagement website and bringing more New Yorkers into the conversation of designing the city. To Melissa Grace, Melissa Gutierrez Soto, and Aaron Smithson for your efforts in crafting the initial versions of this guidebook.

To our colleagues across partner agencies who help shape good urban design whether through parks and public spaces, sidewalks and streets, or city facilities. Thank you for being stewards for a better public realm, elevating civic pride and your feedback in this effort.

- Department of Design and Construction
- Department of Environmental Protection
- Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
- Department of Housing Preservation and Development
- Department of Transportation
- Economic Development Corporation
- Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice
- New York City Housing Authority
- NYC Parks
- Office of the Chief Public Realm Officer
- Public Design Commission
- Small Business Services

To the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter (AIANY) for your continued collaboration and support on city-wide efforts to promote good urban design and AIANY's Planning and Urban Design Committee for hosting workshops and events for this effort.

To the private sector firms that participated in workshops and roundtables:

#### Design Firms

- FX Collaborative
- Gehl Architects
- Henning Larson
- HOK Architects
- Marvel Architects
- SCAPE Landscape Architecture
- Skidmore, Owings & Merrell
- Starr Whitehouse
- Studio Fornly
- TenBerke Architects
- Vinoly Architects
- WXY Architects

#### Development Firms

- Alloy
- Bronx Pro Group
- Gotham Organization
- Hudson Companies
- Jonathan Rose Compaines
- L&M Companies
- Phipps Housing





# Principles of Good Urban Design

*The Principles* are a set of values and goals that inform how to approach the design of NYC. These principles are a lens through which we examine not only how the city looks, but also how it feels to live, work, come together, and move around the city.

*The Principles* describe how design can influence one's daily experience of the city by making it more enjoyable and comfortable; how design can support quality of life, well-being, and health; and how design can help foster a sense of belonging and civic pride. Ultimately, *The Principles of Good Urban Design* communicate a vision of a city that works for everyone—a city that New Yorkers deserve.

