



A Proposal for the
**Office of Public Space
Management**

The New York City government is missing the crucial function of public space management

New York City's streets are operated and controlled by the Department of Transportation (DOT), where traffic engineers manage the streets to maximize their value to the metropolitan transportation network. However, streets are more than just traffic conduits; they are public spaces where city life takes place. Streets are the places where people live, neighbors meet, children play, commerce occurs, and people-watching happens.

In recent years, DOT has broadened its view of street function and created some great public space in places like Times Square, Herald Square, Madison Square and Hudson Square. These public spaces have been a huge success and demand has swelled to turn more streets into people-oriented places across the city, yet DOT has struggled to expand its public space program beyond commercial districts.

The DOT's failure to create attractive public spaces in residential areas has been primarily due to the lack of partner organizations to manage these spaces. NYC's central bureaucracy is poorly suited to local street management, so DOT requires local partner organizations to take on the cost and responsibility for planning, management, maintenance and operation.

To date, many of our most successful public spaces are managed and maintained by Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). BIDs have the funding, staff, and mandate to properly manage public spaces.

BIDs maintain some of NYC's most successful public spaces

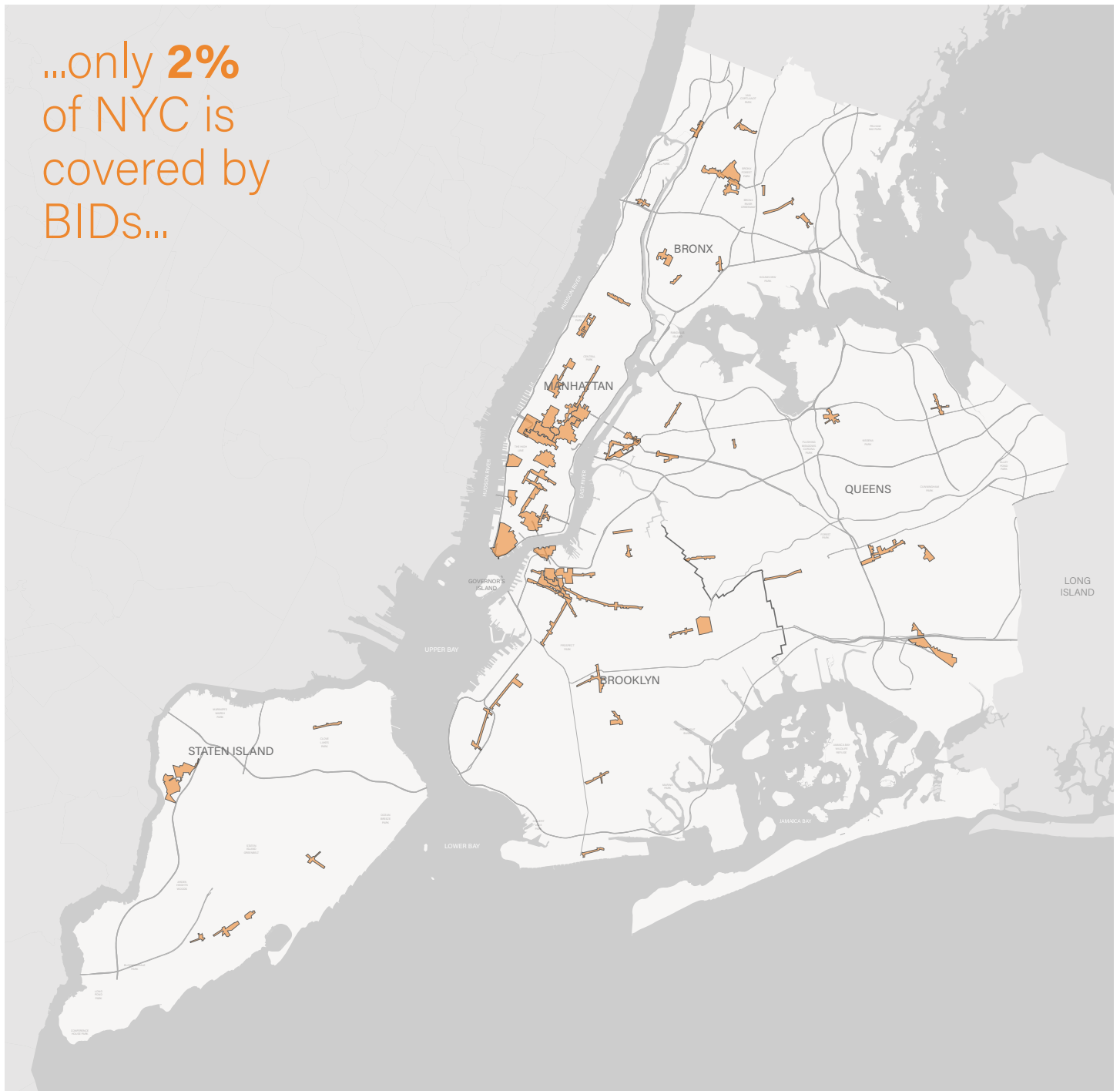


All images: NYC DOT

Unfortunately, only 2% of NYC is covered by BIDs. Despite huge need and demand, most streets in NYC have no local organization that can maintain public spaces. Low income, residential areas are particularly hard hit.

DOT is working with The Horticulture Society of New York on the maintenance of about a dozen small plazas in lower income areas but, even if that program is doubled, that's a tiny dent on NYC's 6000 miles of streets.

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New York City residents can imagine everything from play streets to pollination corridors for bees, and they can help plan events; but at the moment, the government lacks structures with which they can engage, and as a result, most streets in New York City function poorly as public spaces.

This paper lays out a policy framework for the creation of public space management capabilities within the New York City government that will empower the citizens of New York to turn the city's streets into vibrant public spaces.

Main Policy Recommendations

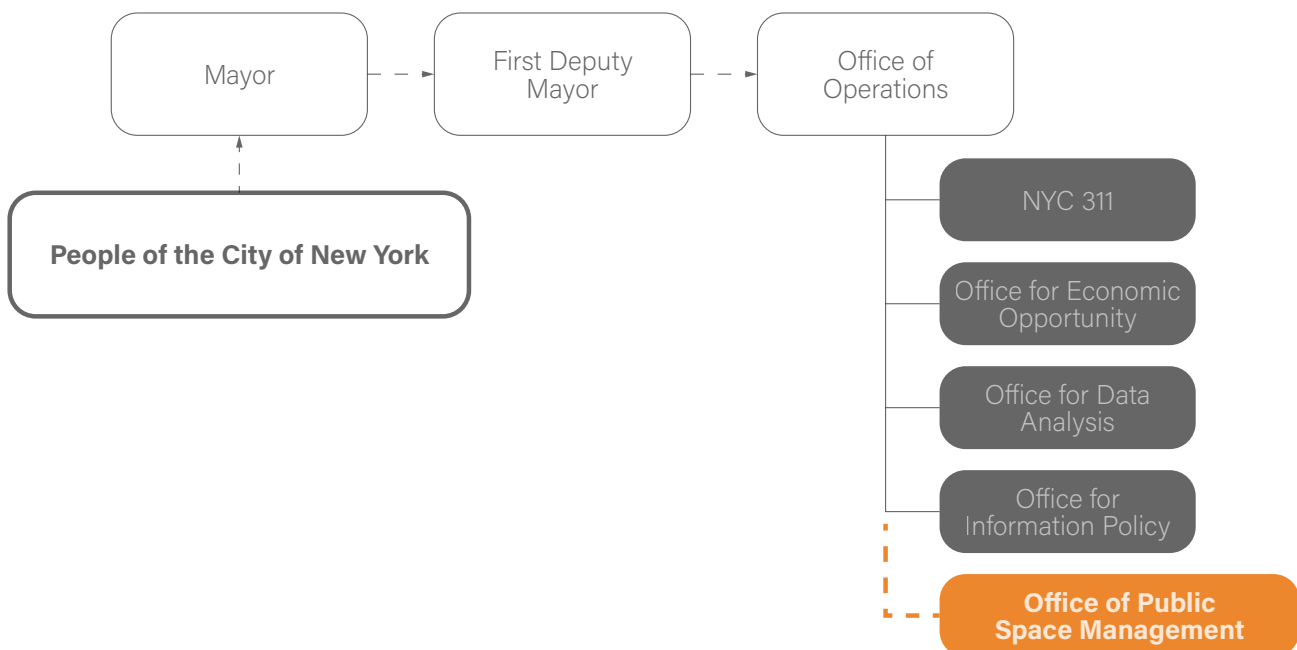
- 1 Create the Office of Public Space Management** led by a commissioner appointed by the Mayor
- 2 Define sectors per community board district**, each to be managed by a paid, full-time, public space manager as an adjunct to the community board
- 3 DOT to create a street hierarchy**, classifying every street according to its value to the transportation network
- 4 NYC agencies create a toolkit**, setting clear guidelines defining which street treatments and uses are allowed on specific types of streets.

The Office of Public Space Management

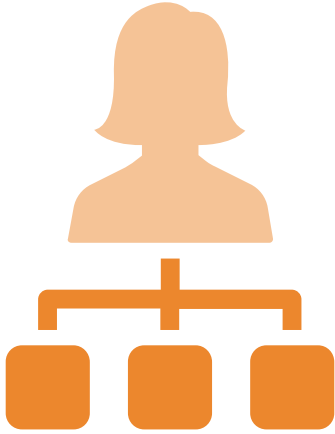
The Mayor should create an Office of Public Space Management, led by a director appointed by the Mayor. The Office Of Public Space Management will have a small central staff responsible for the creation and implementation of a public space management framework across the entirety of New York City. The central management staff will train and oversee the local public space managers who will be directly responsible for managing the public space in a particular sector. The central staff will also develop and deploy technology tools for the management of public spaces.

The Office of Public Space Management will create and define public space management sectors, which will initially be assumed to number five per community board district. Each sector will have a public space manager associated with it.

The central management staff of the Office of Public Space Management will work with a range of agencies and organizations to develop a comprehensive public space management framework for the entire city. The partner agencies and organizations will include, but not be limited to, DOT, the Department of Sanitation, the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Department of Environmental Protection and the Street Activity Permit Organization.



The Public Space Managers



Public Space Managers are the local representatives of the Office of Public Space Management. They have ownership and responsibility for the streets within their sector. They will work with the community to understand their needs and preferences for how their streets are to be used and programmed. Working within the constraints set by the Office of Public Space Management, the Public Space Managers will empower the community to bring to life the streets under their supervision.

Experience with BIDs has shown that a paid professional staff is necessary to oversee the planning, management, engagement, and maintenance of public space. Place management is a nuanced, detailed business.

The Public Space Managers will be housed within the District Office of the Community Board and live in the district they serve.

Empowered by the Office of Public Space Management, the Public Space Managers will work across agencies to coordinate the provision of local services and to ensure that the local needs of their sector are understood by the relevant agency. Public Space Managers will be responsible for all aspects of managing public space, including: community engagement, planning, design, maintenance, programming, and safety.

Defining Public Space Management Sectors



NYC Precinct Map

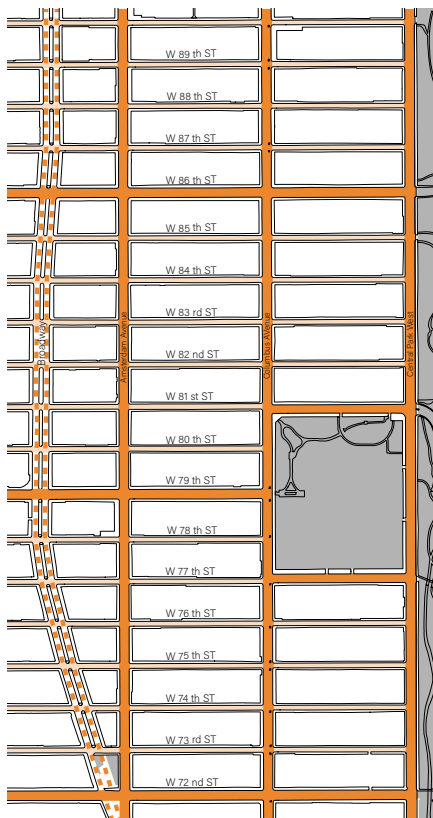
Community Board districts are too large for one person to manage all the intricacies of hundreds of streets. Community Boards could be subdivided into roughly five sub-districts. The NYPD has already defined Police Sectors as a subunit of a police precinct, each of which correlates as much as possible to a distinct neighborhood. These police sectors can serve as a template for defining the public space management sectors.

Actions for NYC DOT

DOT has a crucial role to play in creating a framework for successful public space management. The agency has the conflicting responsibilities of ensuring the proper functioning of the city's roads as a transportation network and the management of the streets as public space for the local residents. At this time, the needs of the transportation network dominate the public space uses of the streets. In order to restore balance to New York City's streets, DOT needs to create a street management framework that includes a street hierarchy that differentiates between network and neighborhood streets and enumerates the policies and street treatments that are available for neighborhood streets.

Street Hierarchy

DOT's hierarchy and classification for each street may include these three categories:



- **Travel Streets** that provide critical transportation links and allow for movement
- **Community Streets** that serve as “Town Centers” for neighborhoods and the Central Business District (CBD), by providing shopping, services, and entertainment and by acting as gathering places
- **Living Streets** that provide access to living or working spaces. Living Streets are the local, typically residential streets where quality of life is the primary concern.

With a street hierarchy in place, the management and programming of Living Streets, or their equivalent, can be handed over to the Public Space Managers. The Public Space Manager can play a subsidiary role in the management of Travel and Community Streets.

Definition of Standard Treatments

A key component of local empowerment needs to be a **standardized, consolidated, set of pre-approved design components and amenities** that local groups can choose to install themselves or have installed on their street. The design elements, currently managed by a variety of agencies, can include the following:

- **Standard bike corrals** (Design standards already set by DOT)
- **Garbage enclosures** (DSNY, DOT)
- **Neckdowns** (DOT)
- **Street seats** (Design standards already set by DOT)
- **Street trees** (DPR)
- **Enlarged tree pits / gardens** (DPR, DOT)
- **Sidewalk inventories** (DPR, DOT, DSNY)
- **Planters** (Design standards already set by DOT)
- **Loading zones** (DOT)
- **Bioswales** (DEP, DOT)
- **Play Streets / Block Parties** (SAPO)
- **Chicanes / traffic diverters** (DOT)



Play Street (Credit: Dudley Stewart)



Bioswale (Credit: NYC Water)



Street Seats: (Credit: NYC DOT)

Funding

Each Public Space Manager will have an annual budget to cover the purchase and installation of select items in the toolkit. The budget will also cover materials for community outreach, programming and a small team that can provide supplemental maintenance.

Maintenance

When suitable, the Public Space Manager can work with local neighborhood groups to maintain small neighborhood gardens and do daily cleaning (local building owners are already responsible for keeping sidewalks clean -- see below). In other cases, the city will assume general maintenance. Per above, the Public Space Managers may share a small staff to supplement City maintenance.

Local Partner Organizations

Each Public Space Manager will partner with, delegate to, or coordinate the work of other local organizations (block associations, schools/PTAs, BIDs, arts organizations, community gardens) interested in working and taking ownership of pieces of the public space in a neighborhood.

The Role of Volunteers

Volunteers are expected to play a key role in bringing local public spaces to life. Like the volunteers who maintain community gardens, public space volunteers can tend plants, program events and host community gatherings. When local stakeholders are actively engaged in the planning, they are more apt to care for the improvements.



Summer Streets Volunteers (Credit: NYC DOT)

Programming

To encourage play and to promote events that inspire neighbors to socialize and connect, each Public Space Manager will help with programming throughout the neighborhood including facilitating board games, art events, music and architectural tours.



Plaza programming (Credit: NYC DOT)

Community Decision Making

A primary responsibility of the Public Space Manager will be to give voice to the local stakeholders and help them nurture and develop the distinct identity of their neighborhoods. To achieve this, the Public Space Manager will spend a significant amount of time speaking with the residents, soliciting ideas, gathering feedback and helping them design and plan their public space. This work will require testing new forms of outreach as well as hosting community workshops. The more engaged stakeholders are with the planning, the more likely they are to feel ownership and to help maintain their streets.

Let's Go!

For most New York City residents, the street is their front yard. By creating this new framework, New Yorkers will be empowered to re-imagine this space as a place to gather and engage and experience a rich civic life.

