

# DESIGN TRUST FOR PUBLIC SPACE



COUNCIL OF FASHION DESIGNERS  
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## ***With \$2 Billion a Year and Thousands of Jobs at Stake, Design Trust for Public Space Proposes Bold Vision for 21st Century Garment District***

New York, NY—The Design Trust for Public Space, a leading urban planning nonprofit, has completed a three-year study of the Garment District’s impact on New York City in partnership with the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA). The Design Trust and the CFDA will release findings and make recommendations for specific actions at a press conference on Wednesday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, at 8:30 a.m. at the CFDA’s Incubator Space, 209 West 38th Street, Room 3F (between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenues).

The report, *Making Midtown: A New Vision for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Garment District in New York City*, calls for unlocking the neighborhood’s real estate value—an incremental annual economic impact of \$340 million—while sustaining the manufacturing infrastructure that is the linchpin of New York’s fashion industry. Combining hard economic, real estate, and labor market data with urban design and policy interventions and a participatory, stakeholder-driven planning process, *Making Midtown* presents the first unified vision for the future of the Garment District.

“The Garment District is that rare thing in this country, a truly mixed-use urban neighborhood with industrial infrastructure at its core,” says Susan Chin, executive director of the Design Trust. “With this report, the Design Trust proposes a model for an urban creative district, one that leverages, rather than replaces, the presence of manufacturing to create real estate value, support jobs, and capture a distinctive identity.”

But time is running out. With some commercial spaces left vacant and others occupied by worthy firms and businesses considered illegal under zoning regulations established in 1987 to protect garment manufacturers, the Garment District is a neighborhood in transition. Adding to this inherent instability are

anticipated changes deriving from the dense, high-end development and public space amenities planned for several surrounding neighborhoods, including Hudson Yards and Midtown East.

*Making Midtown* shows that the century-old district at Manhattan’s core is an asset worth protecting, one that contributes \$2 billion a year to the local economy. The Garment District alone generates 7,100 jobs and is critical to New York’s City’s \$9 billion a year fashion industry, which provides the City with over 170,000 jobs. Garment District production remains important to the vast majority of fashion designers, including Nanette Lepore and Jason Wu, who may now find it less expensive to manufacture clothing in midtown Manhattan than overseas. “One of this country’s most unlikely urban trends in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been the resurgence of manufacturing,” says Ms. Chin, noting that apparel production accounts for nearly one-third of all of New York City’s manufacturing jobs.

Although the neighborhood is an incubator of new talent, trends and techniques and a provider of richly varied jobs during America’s worst recession, *Making Midtown* documents the fact that the district’s full potential has yet to be realized. In the report, the Design Trust outlines 17 recommendations—achievable through coordinated private and public sector investment over the next ten years—that, if implemented, have the potential to boost New York City’s annual revenue by an added \$340 million.

The Design Trust’s key recommendations to City officials include:

- **Establish voluntary, market-based zoning incentives** for dedicated manufacturing space;
- **Retain existing industrial base with tax incentives** to manufacturers;
- **Upgrade the quality of the District’s public spaces** with widened sidewalks, dynamic streetscapes, improved traffic patterns, and temporary installations (like transforming underutilized loading docks into pop-up shops) to strengthen District’s identity;
- **Boost demand for local fashion** by launching the “NYC Made” branding campaign and offering tax credits for designers who agree to produce locally;
- **Develop a NYC Fashion Innovation Center** featuring exhibition space, classrooms and a resource library that functions as a one-stop shop for the fashion industry.

In short, *Making Midtown* recommendations repositioning the Garment District in three ways: as an economic engine, as an industrial hub, and as an urban destination. The top priority is the retention of the 270 factories now located in the Garment District—up to 40 firms per block—while helping property owners to free up an additional four million square feet of available space for mixed use.

“The Garment District’s craftspeople and manufacturers provide irreplaceable expertise built over several generations,” says fashion designer Yeohlee Teng, of the label YEOHLEE. “With dozens of specialists and factories on every block, and the kind of personalized interaction that spur innovation, a young designer located here can, with limited financing, take an article of clothing from sketch to finished garment.”

*“Making Midtown* is a study on how the garment district works. It measures the value that the fashion industry brings to the City overall,” says Steven Kolb, CFDA Chief Executive Officer. “Thanks to this project, New York City has a roadmap that benefits all the stakeholders in this neighborhood and our industry. Everyone from designers, manufacturers and suppliers to property owners can benefit from it.”

### **Project History**

The Design Trust’s Garment District project came about when the CFDA approached the Design Trust in 2009, at a moment when the City administration was proposing to change the zoning laws that protect apparel manufacturing space in the District. The first part of the two-phased study, *Made in Midtown*, culminated in 2010 with a multimedia website (<http://madeinmidtown.org>) that revealed why the district is important to the City and the fashion industry. *Making Midtown*, the final report, uses detailed economic analysis to propose strategies that will allow the New York-based fashion industry to compete successfully with other major cities.

*Making Midtown* was independently conducted by the Design Trust for Public Space in partnership with the CFDA, with economic and fiscal impact analyses provided by an independent contractor, HR&A Advisors, Inc. Project Fellows Andrew Bernheimer, Colin Cathcart, Kei Hayashi, and Rob Lane conducted exhaustive research, engaging the Garment District’s diverse stakeholders through two participatory planning workshops. Jerome Chou, former Director of Programs, Design Trust for Public Space, is the editor of *Making Midtown: A New Vision for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Garment District* and one of four authors of the report along with Cathcart, Hayashi, and Lane.

### **Design Trust for Public Space**

The Design Trust for Public Space has helped to realize more than 30 public/private projects in New York City since its founding in 1995. Today, when New Yorkers see new taxis on the street or stroll the length of the High Line, they are enjoying the fruits of labor begun and nurtured by the Design Trust. The non-profit is unique in New York in its mission to forge public/private partnerships that improve the quality of the City’s public realm—from the creation of parks, plazas and streets to public buildings and modes of transportation.

For more information on *Making Midtown*, the public may visit <http://www.designtrust.org/>

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