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DESIGN TRUST FOR PUBLIC SPACE ANNOUNCES THE WINNERS OF THE 2017 CALL FOR PROJECT IDEAS,
PUBLIC FOR ALL: RETHINKING SHARED SPACE IN NYC

“Community Land Trust as a Model for Public Space”
and
“When the Going Gets Tough…Addressing Equity & Quality of Life in Community-Managed Public Spaces”

Two projects will advance community ownership of public land and buildings in the South Bronx, and provide egalitarian, welcoming public spaces and maintenance strategies across New York City.

NEW YORK, NY (Thursday, July 13, 2017) – The Design Trust for Public Space is excited to announce the winners of the 2017 Call for Project Ideas, entitled Public for All: Rethinking Shared Space in NYC. The winning projects are (in alphabetical order): Community Land Trust as a Model for Public Space; and When the Going Gets Tough…Addressing Equity & Quality of Life in Community-Managed Public Spaces.

Community Land Trust as a Model for Public Space
Proposer: South Bronx Unite, in collaboration with New York City Community Land Initiative and the Mott Haven-Port Morris Community Land Stewards.

Building on a deep legacy of community organizing roots, which has manifested in a dynamic community land trust (CLT) model for community-driven development of underutilized public space, South Bronx Unite seeks to build a precedential data and mapping project that geographically identifies potential physical assets, social and cultural capital, as well as impediments, for the creation of affordable public space responsive to community needs in the Mott Haven-Port Morris area in the Bronx. The project will organize those assets into an umbrella urban development plan, and establish an advocacy platform for presenting such results to the community, policy makers and other stakeholders. This will advance the community land trust as a sustainable community-owned development model citywide.

The Mott Haven-Port Morris community in the Bronx is struggling to overcome decades of environmental injustice and economic neglect. Lining the waterfront sits one of the city’s largest industrial areas, where fossil fuel power plants, waste transfer stations and diesel truck-intensive businesses have caused a health crisis across the community, which faces asthma rates eight times the national average. On top of that, 12 market rate rentals and six hotel developments will soon bring thousands of luxury residential units into this community, in which 38% of its residents and 49% of its children live in poverty, with an average median income of $19,454—the lowest in the state—and an unemployment rate more than three times the national rate.

Photos courtesy of South Bronx Unite and the Horticultural Society of New York
A community land trust would allow neighborhood residents to own and manage real estate for the perpetual public benefit. “We’ve been recharged with the belief that community is the answer—and empowering those who have been left behind. We thank you for understanding the need for us to fight together for our community,” said Mychal Johnson, Co-founder, South Bronx Unite.

When the Going Gets Tough...Addressing Equity & Quality of Life in Community-Managed Public Spaces

Proposer: Neighborhood Plaza Program of the Horticultural Society of New York in collaboration with Uptown Grand Central, NYC Department of Transportation (DOT) Plaza Partner managing 125th Street Plaza in East Harlem, and with participation of an interagency task force including NYC DOT, NYC Department of Small Business Service, and others.

Close to half of NYC’s 70 pedestrian plazas are in under-served communities. New Yorkers love these plazas, so even struggling organizations are willing to invest the time, money and sweat equity to privately manage them. This project will explore innovative strategies for addressing the challenge of operating and programming public space in neighborhoods where resources are scarce, organizational capacity is low, and quality of life infractions are frequent.

The NYC Department of Transportation (DOT) Plaza Program is delivering public realm improvements across the five boroughs. The city invests capital to build plazas; community-based partners bring them to life. By many measures, the program is a success—improving public safety, community events, and civic engagement. But in economically distressed communities, plaza management faces many challenges, such as public intoxication, human waste, discarded drug needles, emotionally disturbed patrons, vermin infestations, illegal dumping, furniture and plant vandalism.

High-need plaza partners want their spaces to be as welcoming to a homeless person as to children. This project will dedicate significant resources to 125th Street Plaza, while exploring solutions for the network of 14 other plazas in urgent need of assistance across the five boroughs. “Throughout the city, our plaza partners work hard to meet the challenge of managing clean, green, and safe public plazas,” said Sean Quinn, Senior Director, Office of Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs, NYC Department of Transportation. “Ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to high-quality public spaces regardless of where they live is a priority for the NYC Department of Transportation. Meeting that goal can be especially difficult in neighborhoods where lower capacity partners face an increased maintenance burden and other quality of life issues with fewer resources than their counterparts in more affluent areas of the city. We support the Horticultural Society’s and Uptown Grand Central’s proposal to explore a range of innovative solutions for these issues on behalf of all of our high-need plaza partners.”

How did the Design Trust choose projects from the Public for All Call for Project Ideas?

Out of 105 initial responses from community groups, city agencies, and individuals across the five boroughs, Design Trust invited 30 proposers to submit full citywide research, design, and planning proposals. An independent jury chose two winners from five finalist projects. Jurors include: Kitty Hawks, Kitty Hawks Interiors, Design Trust Founder’s Circle; Walter Hood, Hood Design Studio; Patti S. Lubin, Office of U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand; Kerry A. McLean, Women’s Housing and Economic Development Corporation; Zack McKown, Tsao & McKown Architects, Design Trust Board [non-voting], Justin Garrett Moore, NYC Public Design Commission; José Serrano-McClain, NYC Mayor’s Office of Tech + Innovation; Claire Weisz, WXY Architecture + Urban Design, Design Trust Founder’s Circle; and Andrea Woodner, Design Trust Founder and President Emeritus.

What happens after the Design Trust selects winners?

The Design Trust will develop and implement the winning project ideas in partnership with their proposers, engaging community stakeholders from the get-go. Design Trust projects create tangible impact by changing the system, by producing replicable models or tools, by creating a catalyst, and by building a well-informed constituency.

“We can’t wait to start working with our new project partners to lift these brilliant ideas off the ground. We’re excited to be able to address together the fundamental questions of a thriving global metropolis that struggles with social,
economic, and environmental injustices. How do we balance the newcomers and the folks who have been here for a long time? How do we figure out a framework that allows for change, while keeping the heart of what our neighborhoods have been? We’ll keep you abreast of how our two new Public for All projects develop!” said Susan Chin, FAIA, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director, Design Trust for Public Space.

What did the Public for All jury say?
“Almost every completed Design Trust project serves as a template that can be used by other cities in many scales. The High Line, for example, has already been replicated in other cities. In the South Bronx, we’re talking about a community that has been struggling for a very long time. What finally becomes clear is that the top-down approach is not going to fix anything. South Bronx Unite demonstrates the community working for itself. It’s impressive how many stakeholders they’ve already brought together and how clear their vision is around advancing the model of community land trust. It surely has the potential to become a template for other cities, when completed. It’s equally outstanding that the Horticultural Society of New York is not trying to fix the ‘homeless problem’. They want to work with the homeless people and that can be a model for many cities across the nation that grapple with similar challenges,” said Kitty Hawks, Kitty Hawks Interiors, Design Trust Founder’s Circle.

“I applaud the winners and their hard work. I’m taken by how readily each proposal deals with the parts of the public realm that most people and organizations shy away from, such as maintenance, homelessness, and public ownership. Both projects tap into the core issues in the public realm and these are the challenges that we don’t have straight answers for. I can’t wait to see what the teams will come up with as the projects develop,” said Walter Hood, Hood Design Studio.

“What excites me most about these projects is their courage to tackle the issues that we oftentimes resign ourselves to not having an answer for. Design Trust is well positioned to lend their expertise on design and policy to be able to push and challenge the system and the project teams. Both projects will have implications on equitable public space, from affordable housing and neighborhood stabilization, to creating a safe and welcoming urban environment,” said Kerry A. McLean, Community Development Vice President, Women’s Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDco).

“What impressed me about South Bronx Unite’s proposal is that it’s a very practical approach and yet a radical one. Though the community land trust model is relatively untested, through their comprehensive social and physical asset mapping of the Mott Haven-Port Morris area, I believe South Bronx Unite can unlock the potential of this new ownership model for great long-term benefits to this severely under-served South Bronx community. Similarly, starting with the 125th Street Plaza as a pilot, the Horticultural Society will benefit many New York communities. Their fine-grained observations of how that plaza is currently being used by an immensely diverse population, including a great many homeless people who depend on it as their daytime shelter—when they must vacate city run shelters—plus their observations of how community members have responded to their thoughtfully planned experimental programs, will provide an extraordinarily well informed brief for the designs of physical improvements that will be made to this plaza and subsequently inform improvements to other plazas citywide,” said Zack McKown, Tsao & McKown Architects, Design Trust Board.

“Public space is not only physical space, but all the things that we need to understand to create truly public spaces. Both projects intently approach ‘public space’ from that standpoint of knowledge- and community-building. The Horticultural Society of New York embraces the homeless community and their challenges at the 125th Plaza in Harlem in their plan to explore better practices for plazas across the city. South Bronx Unite is trying to figure out the right toolkit and technology that the local people need to know to understand the complexities of ownership, assets, and control of public space for the benefit of the community,” said Justin Garrett Moore, Executive Director, NYC Public Design Commission.
“The impact of these projects can be very powerful. They both have a clear strategy for how they scale citywide. South Bronx United’s deep connections to the networks of organizations that are advancing community land trusts throughout the city can help accelerate the movement citywide. Similarly, the work of Uptown Grand Central and Neighborhood Plaza Partnership to experiment with new ways to maintain and program public plazas in deeply empathetic and inclusive ways, especially in the context of a housing and mental health crisis in our city, seem especially urgent. This is precisely the time that we need to imaginatively renegotiate the complexities of sharing public space,” said José Serrano-McClain, Neighborhood Innovation Labs program lead at the NYC Mayor’s Office of Tech + Innovation.

“It was a privilege to be able to interact with so many passionate and knowledgeable people, on both sides of the presentation. All the proposals we looked at were creative, imaginative, convincing, and quite varied from one another. We looked at under-utilized space, hyper-utilized space, and wrongly utilized space. Yet each proposal was deeply committed to social equity and parity, and sought in its own way to enable collective responsibility and foster a sense of belonging, which to me is the heart and soul of Public for All, and indeed the Design Trust! While we wished we could have selected all five projects, we have high hopes that the chosen two will take advantage of the secret sauce of the Design Trust, which brings together a diverse team to start connecting the dots,” said Andrea Woodner, Design Trust Founder and President Emeritus.

**Design Trust for Public Space**
The Design Trust for Public Space is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the future of public space in New York City. Our projects bring together city agencies, community groups and private sector experts to make a lasting impact—through design—on how New Yorkers live, work and play. Our work can be seen, felt and experienced throughout all five boroughs—from parks and plazas to streets and public buildings. The Design Trust saved the High Line structure, jumpstarted NYC’s first custom-built Taxi of Tomorrow, developed the Community Design School for Flushing Meadows Corona Park, and created the city’s first comprehensive sustainability guidelines that became the precursor to Local Law 86 and PlaNYC, now OneNYC. [http://designtrust.org/](http://designtrust.org/)

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