NYC Public Space Advocates Respond to Mayor Adams’ Economic Recovery Plan

Statement from the Design Trust for Public Space’s Executive Director Matthew Clarke

New York, NY, — New York City Mayor Eric Adams’ office released “Rebuild, Renew, Reinvent: A Blueprint for New York City’s Economic Recovery,” which outlines the Mayor’s vision for the city’s economic recovery. Design Trust Executive Director Matthew Clarke issued the following statement in response:

“Small businesses play a unique and critical role in the livelihood of our neighborhoods and public spaces. The pandemic has further illuminated just how important it is to protect and uplift these spaces as community cornerstones. With the ongoing crisis hitting commercial corridors and main streets hard, we need innovative strategies to reactivate the public realm.

“We applaud Mayor Adams’ blueprint as an important first step to support NYC’s economic recovery and the businesses that anchor its communities, but will fight to make sure these benefits reach all New Yorkers. We agree with this plan’s recommendation that an interagency working group to coordinate citywide policy and program implementation in the public realm is long overdue. We have the opportunity to leverage public spaces in the right-of-way (e.g. pedestrian plazas, open streets, outdoor dining, street seats, sidewalk cafes, etc.) to support local economies in a way that is inclusive, equitable, and representative of the diversity of the city’s neighborhoods.

“That’s why we partnered with the New York City Department of Small Business Services (SBS) in 2020 to launch Neighborhood Commons, an initiative designed to help New York City activate its public spaces in commercial corridors to support long-term resilience and economic recovery. After researching and analyzing 10 - 15 case study neighborhoods, we will be publishing a toolkit and recommendations next month on ways the City can reshape its approach to the management of these spaces. Two pilot projects will be developed to test out these recommendations.

“We are eager to work with this administration and community groups to create better practices for public space stewardship and evolve the city’s landscape to work for all New Yorkers.”

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The Design Trust for Public Space is a nationally recognized incubator that catalyzes change and transforms New York City’s shared civic spaces—streets, plazas, parks, public buildings, transportation, and housing developments—to create a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable city. Established in 1995 by Andrea Woodner, the nonprofit brings design expertise and systems thinking to the public realm to make a lasting impact. Founded on the tenet that New York
City’s cultural and democratic life depends on viable public space, the Design Trust focuses on social justice and equity, environmental sustainability, design excellence, and public engagement. Its innovative model brings together government agencies, community groups, and private-sector experts, utilizing cross-sector partnerships to deliver creative solutions that shape the city’s landscape.