

# DESIGN TRUST FOR PUBLIC SPACE

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## ***Lower East Side celebrates upcoming resident-designed open space at NYCHA***

***“Opening the Edge” announces the long-awaited construction of  
community area at Lillian Wald Houses***

**New York, NY** – TODAY, The Design Trust for Public Space, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents, and local leaders gathered for a community event celebrating the upcoming construction of the **Opening the Edge** project at the Lillian Wald Houses in the Lower East Side.

Opening the Edge, proposed by artist Jane Greengold and developed in partnership with NYCHA, is a resident-led, participatory design project intended to remove the fence around an inaccessible grassy area of the Lillian Wald Houses on the Lower East Side and create a new, welcoming open space for the community.

With food, music, interactive art and a public debut of design renderings, neighbors and city leaders celebrated this historic win for the community.

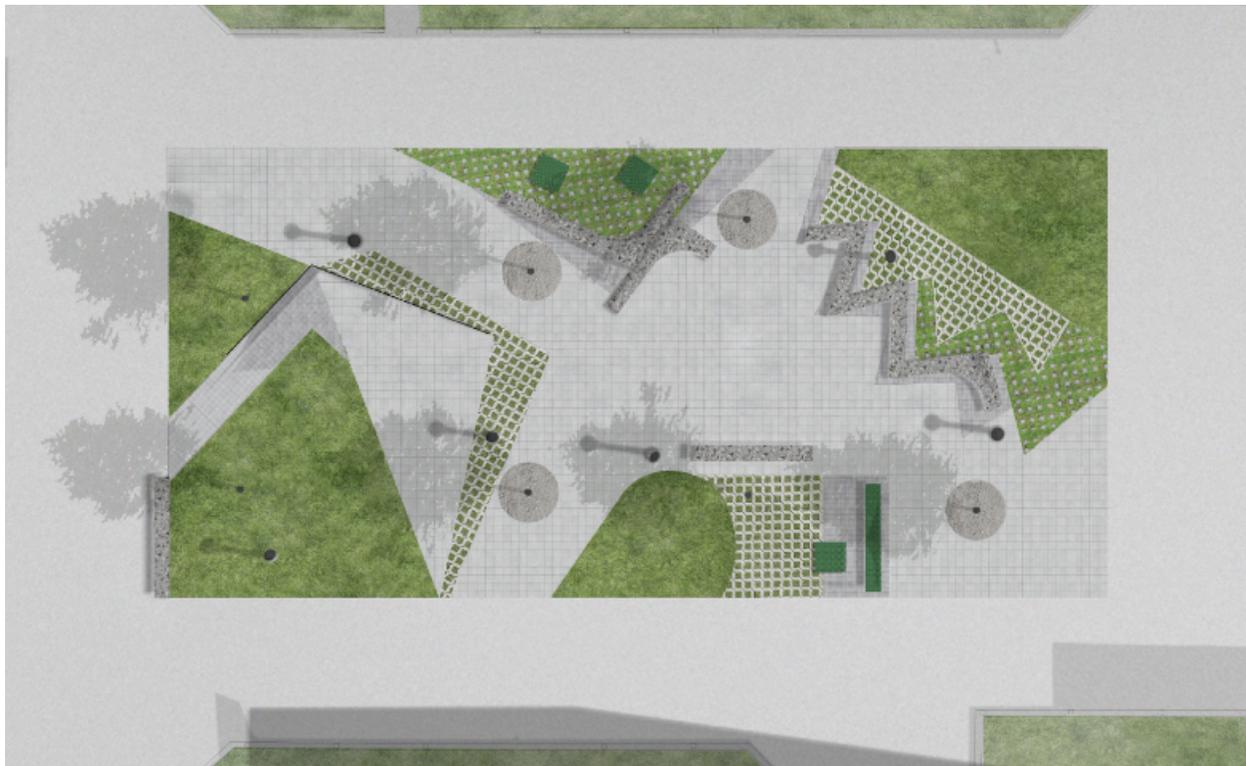
Since 2014, a coalition of residents, neighbors and the Design Trust for Public Space have been advocating for removing the fence and reimagining this underutilized space. Over the course of the project, Opening the Edge has held more than 25 meetings and dozens of outreach events to prototype a new design, working closely with Davies Toews Architecture, The PARC Foundation, and NYCHA’s Asset & Capital Management Division. Through multiple participatory design workshops, funded by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), residents expressed the need for more seating and space allowing for cultural programming, including planned or impromptu performances.

The current fence around the site prohibits any use by residents, and many commented that they would like to be able to move through the open space more freely. The new accessible design will have benches, a sloped platform for performances, tables, paths and new lighting (and no fence!)

*"Lighting the Edge" art installation engages residents about the potential of the fenced off space  
Rendering of 'Opening the Edge' space design by Davies Toews*



Rendering of 'Opening the Edge' space design by Davies Toews



This project is part of NYCHA's **Connected Communities** program, which is focused on transforming and modernizing open spaces by implementing public-private partnerships. The program's efforts are based on participatory planning and design, and strive to enhance vibrant, safer, and more resilient open spaces in NYCHA communities. Over the course of the project's development, Opening the Edge's participatory process inspired Connected Communities and **Green Space Connections**, a citywide effort led by the Public Housing Community Fund and the Design Trust to create and activate community-designed green space. It has also paved the way for a soon-to-be-announced national coalition connecting public housing residents with public space improvements.

"The combination of accessible open space and resident-driven leadership have inextricable connections to overall community health," **said Executive Director of the Design Trust for Public Space Matthew Clarke**. "Opening the Edge has fought for a simple improvement, but in doing so, has served as a catalyst for a new way of thinking around resident ownership of public spaces in NYCHA neighborhoods. We are ecstatic to see this idea finally come to life and for Lower East Side residents to enjoy a thriving new open space."

"Today we celebrate a remarkable step towards transforming a NYCHA open space into a vibrant community hub as we move toward the start of construction in the coming months," **said NYCHA Chief Executive Officer Lisa Bova-Hiatt**. "The Opening the Edge project underscores the power of resident-led design, creating not just a new open space, but a renewed sense of community ownership. We are committed to enhancing quality of life for all NYCHA residents, and this project is a wonderful example of what can be achieved when we work together."

"It's been a privilege for our firm to help re-envision this area of the Lillian Wald Houses," **said Jonathan Toews, Partner and Co-Founder of Davies Toews Architecture**. "The collaborative process with residents, artists, Design Trust fellows, and other stakeholders has been a thrill, and we are so lucky to be able to participate in a project within blocks of our home and office. We are truly looking forward to watching the design become a reality as we move into this final phase of construction."

"Our public and green spaces are a respite from the busy life of the city, a meeting place for friends, an adventure for children, and beloved by all. I'm thrilled to celebrate the upcoming construction of a new public space at Lillian Wald Houses and am proud to have been able to secure capital funding to help bring the community's vision to life. Proximity to green space is related to better quality of life and wellbeing, and Opening the Edge will promote social interaction, cultural opportunities, and recreational activities," **said Council Member Carlina Rivera (D-02)**.

"It is important for NYCHA residents to have access to community green space," **said Assembly Member Harvey Epstein**. "I am excited to see the outcome of this tenant-led participatory design project and see this land be put to use for residents to enjoy."

“When in 2014, I proposed to the Design Trust for Public Space, a project called ‘Opening the Edge,’ my goal was simple: encourage NYCHA to take down the fences around one grass space inside a NYCHA Development as the beginning of opening many such NYCHA spaces for the use of residents,” **said Participatory Art Fellow and Proposer of Opening the Edge, Jane Greengold.** “I hope residents of Wald Houses will enjoy the use of their new open space, and that it will lead to the opening of other grass spaces at NYCHA.”

“A catalyst for community strength and growth, successful creative placemaking reflects local engagement and feedback from the community,” said **Erika Mallin, Executive Director of New York State Council on the Arts.** “A proud supporter of Design Trust for nearly thirty years, we applaud this collective partnership to improve public space and best serve the needs of the Lower East Side.”

“Opening the Edge shows the power of art and culture to bring people together and harness the strength of collective action to make positive changes in our communities,” said **Cultural Affairs Commissioner Laurie Cumbo.** “I applaud the NYCHA residents at Lillian Wald Houses, the team at Design Trust for Public Space, and everyone who has supported this project on reaching this extraordinary milestone. Now, this under-used space will be transformed into a center for culture, community, joy, rest, action, and anything else the residents can dream up for it. And that is a beautiful thing.”

“After nearly a decade in the making, I'm excited for everyone to finally have access to this space,” said **Destiny Mata, Wald Resident and Opening the Edge Community Organizing Fellow.** “What really excites me is seeing how the community will bring it to life and make it their own!”

“Opening The Edge is not just a transformation of space; it’s a transformation of community spirit, turning an overlooked area into a source of pride for the residents of Lillian Wald,” said **Mollie Serena, Wald Resident and Opening the Edge Community Engagement Fellow.** “We’ve re-envisioned public space to reflect the cultural identity and resilience of the community, offering a sanctuary for creativity and engagement through Lighting The Edge’s light art installation fostering a sense of pride and community. The residents have come to refer to the space as ‘our special art corner.’”

“Much appreciation to its residents, community groups, neighborhood stakeholders, supporters, Design Trust, and fellows team for your fortitude, patience, persistence and perseverance in co-creating this monumental space,” **said Active Design Fellow for Opening the Edge, Immanuel Oni.** “Along with the community design team of Wald residents, the aim was to create a spatial model and platform to address fenced-in/under-utilized spaces in public housing developments. We believe this initiative has catalyzed and will continue to inspire more resident community groups to reclaim under-utilized sites across NYCHA.”

"Access to public space is key to how we foster communities in New York, and Opening the Edge will do just that through its thoughtful, community-led design," said **Carlo A. Scissura, Esq., President and CEO, New York Building Congress**. "This project shows what can be achieved when residents take the lead in reimagining their environment, turning once inaccessible or underused plots into neighborhood resources. The New York Building Congress, through our Building Foundation, is proud to provide financial support for this incredible project that models how New York can activate spaces where everyone can feel a part of their community and thrive together."

Construction is anticipated to begin in the coming months. ***Opening the Edge* project spokespeople and resident leaders are available for further comment. Please contact Alexa Mauzy-Lewis** (amauzy@designtrust.org) to coordinate. Learn more about the project's history [here](#).

*This project was awarded capital funding by Council Member Carlina Rivera and then-Borough President Gale Brewer. Additional funding generously provided by NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, PARC Foundation, Trinity Church Wall Street Foundation, Public Housing Community Fund, National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, NYC Building Congress Foundation, and Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation. Opening the Edge honors the work and legacy of Rebecca Hill Leising, the project's Landscape Architecture Fellow who passed away in 2020.*

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### **About the Design Trust for Public Space**

The [Design Trust for Public Space](#) is a non-profit organization that unlocks the potential of New York's public spaces. Our unique model catalyzes design ideas into action for a more just and equitable city. Founded in 1995 by Andrea Woodner on the tenet that New York City's cultural and democratic life depends on viable public space, today, the Design Trust is a nationally recognized incubator and thought leader that 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.

### **About New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)**

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), the largest public housing authority in North America, was created in 1935 to provide decent, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers. NYCHA is home to 1 in 17 New Yorkers, providing affordable housing to 528,105 authorized residents through public housing and Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) programs as well as Section 8 housing. NYCHA has 177,569 apartments in 2,411 buildings across 335 conventional public housing and PACT developments. In addition, NYCHA connects residents to critical programs and services from external and internal partners, with a focus on economic opportunity, youth, seniors, and social services. With a housing stock that spans all five boroughs, NYCHA is a city within a city.