

DESIGN TRUST FOR PUBLIC SPACE

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Contact: Alexa Mauzy-Lewis

Design Trust for Public Space Senior Communications Manager

amauzy@designtrust.org

619-849-0213

Lower East Side celebrates new resident-designed open space at NYCHA

*“Opening the Edge” replaces Lillian Wald Houses’ fenced-off
area with a space for community gathering*

New York, NY – Yesterday, The Design Trust for Public Space, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents, and local leaders gathered for a ribbon-cutting ceremony, unveiling the long-awaited **Opening the Edge** project at the Lillian Wald Houses in the Lower East Side.

Opening the Edge, proposed by artist Jane Greengold in 2014 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.

The fence around the site prohibited any use by residents, and many commented that they would like to be able to move through the open space more freely.

For nearly a decade, a coalition of residents, neighbors and the Design Trust for Public Space have been advocating to reimagine 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 new accessible design features unique benches, a sloped platform for performances, tables, paths and new lighting (and no fence!) with contracting provided by Dubner Landscaping & Construction and support from Sterling Project Development, Langan Engineering & Environmental Services, Dwaal Lighting, and TYLin.



10 Years of Opening the Edge community engagement courtesy of the Design Trust. Aerial of Opening the Edge in progress courtesy of Mollie Serena. Design Rendering courtesy of Davies Toews.



Final stages of construction ahead of the 11/12 ribbon cutting, courtesy of Davies Toews.



Residents, project leaders, and local representatives gathered to cut the "fence" once and for all and open the park on 11/12, courtesy of the Design Trust.

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. OTE has also paved the way for a **national convening** happening tomorrow of public housing authorities and community partners, hosted by the Design Trust and the Trust for Public Land, to scale these ideas and connect a wider reach of public housing residents with the power of 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."

"This ribbon-cutting marks the successful culmination of the 'Opening the Edge' project, demonstrating that when NYCHA works in partnership with residents, we can transform our communities for the better," **said NYCHA Chief Executive Officer Lisa Bova-Hiatt**. "It is a pleasure to unveil this resident-led, beautifully designed open space that will serve as a gathering place for residents for years to come. This new space is a testament to our commitment to enhancing the quality of life for all NYCHA residents by investing in spaces where the community thrives."

"Culture offers a powerful tool for re-imagining our city and our civic realm, a way to transform shared spaces into sites of cross-pollination for people, communities, and ideas," **said NYC Cultural Affairs Commissioner Laurie Cumbo**. "The Design Trust for Public Space's visionary 'Opening the Edge' has used the arts to catalyze the Lillian Wald community to come together and make a real, tangible change to their shared spaces. Now, an area that once was off-limits can host performances, relaxation, and moments of connection both large and small. We're proud of our support for the residents, artists, advocates, and leaders who worked for over a decade to bring this vision to life."

"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."

“Accessible public spaces and civic engagement are both key components of thriving, welcoming communities, and Opening the Edge delivered both to the Lillian Wald Houses. It's inspiring to see how our community's NYCHA residents worked collectively to improve this public space for their neighbors,” **said New York State Assembly Member Harvey Epstein.**

“We're so happy to share the completed park with the Lillian Wald community today,” said **Jonathan Toews, Founder and Principal at Davies Toews Architecture.** “This final step has been especially rewarding; it was a really collaborative construction effort, in which everyone worked together to ensure that the full, joyful vision for this park was realized. The result is truly a reflection of the care and energy that so many people have contributed to this project over the past ten years.”

“We're delighted to have been part of the team that was able to bring Jane's vision for this small, gated piece of land to a joyful community amenity,” said **Joelle Byrer, Co-Director of Sterling Project Development's Civic and Cultural Practice.** “It was truly a pleasure to work with the team and all the stakeholders.”

Opening the Edge project spokespeople and resident leaders are available for further comment. Please contact Alexa Mauzy-Lewis (amauzy@designtrust.org) to coordinate or request additional photos of the project or ribbon-cutting.

This project was awarded capital funding by then-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. Learn more about the project's history [here](#).

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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.