“The Neurodiverse City” Calls for Inclusive Public Spaces in NYC

Coalition of disability advocates to conduct “sensory audits” and use findings to prototype neuroinclusive spaces, advocate for accessibility policy changes

New York, NY, November 9, 2023 – The Design Trust for Public Space, Verona Carpenter Architects, WIP Collaborative, and a network of disability advocates have partnered on a new initiative, “The Neurodiverse City,” to reimagine New York City’s public spaces — streets, playgrounds, plazas, and more — to better support neurodiversity. The Neurodiverse City seeks to celebrate and support neurodiversity by building a broad-based coalition of self-advocates and partners, identifying ways to quantify and qualify neuroinclusive space, and seeking out meaningful policy change in key areas where these ideas can be scaled and broadened.

Neurodiversity is the diversity of human minds, the infinite variation in brain functioning that exists in our world. Neurodivergent people — including people with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyspraxia, dyslexia, intellectual disabilities, and mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and PTSD — are often excluded from public space access because the planning and construction of our communities does not take into account the cognitive, sensory, and social variation inherent in our neurodiverse world.

To shed light on the disabling and enabling aspects of public spaces and imagine ways of doing better, The Neurodiverse City project will begin by conducting evaluations of the sensory and spatial characteristics of select streetscapes and playgrounds, with the goal of creating a replicable tool for use in other types of public spaces. These audits will be conducted with neurodivergent self-advocates and stakeholders, and the first session will take place on November 11th at the Luther Gulick Playground on the Lower East Side. The Neurodiverse City put out a call to families and children ages 5-14 who receive special education services, medical accommodations, or disability services at school or home to share ideas for making better playgrounds for all. (Learn more about the event here.) A streetscape audit with self-advocates, ages 16-24, will be conducted later this month.

The findings from the audits will be used to create assessment tools and design prototypes for more inclusive practices that support the greatest range of physical and neurological differences, as well as engage government agencies that share jurisdiction over the design of New York City and start conversations around policy change. Design
strategies that are essential to some will create environments that work better for everyone, and where the widest range of people can thrive.

“Play is a human right – and all of New York’s kids deserve public places where they can joyfully be themselves,” said Jennifer Carpenter, AIA, Principal of Verona Carpenter Architects. “We are so excited to work with neurodivergent kids and their families to learn how to make this city work better for them.”

“The public is neurodiverse, and the public realm should be designed to celebrate and support a broader range of individual and collective experiences of it,” said Lindsay Harkema, Co-Founding Member of WIP Collaborative.

“Public spaces are only accessible if they can be meaningfully used by the full range of the public,” said Matthew Clarke, Executive Director of the Design Trust for Public Space, “The planning of our built environment must take into account our neurodiverse communities. The Design Trust for Public Space is proud to be a part of this mission to create equitable community space for all.”

The project is guided by an Advisory Committee composed of a diverse group of self-advocates and community leaders and in collaboration with community partners to shepherd the initiative, including the Center for Independence of the Disabled-NY and INCLUDEnyc. This Neurodiverse City is a winner of the Design Trust’s most recent Request for Proposals, The Restorative City, themed around building community wellness through public space.

Neurodiverse City project partners and disability advocates are available for further comment. Please contact Alexa Mauzy-Lewis (amauzy@designtrust.org) to coordinate an interview. Learn more at www.designtrust.org/projects/neurodiverse-city/

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![The Neurodiverse City](image-url)
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.

About Verona Carpenter Architects
Verona Carpenter Architects is an architecture and interior design firm based in Manhattan, designing for greater inclusion by recognizing and embracing the neurodiverse world we live in. VCA is a city and state certified Women-owned Business Entity (WBE).

About Work in Progress | Women in Practice
WIP Collaborative is a shared feminist practice of independent design professionals working together on projects that engage community and the public realm. WIP is certified as a Women-owned Business Entity (WBE).