The Restorative City: Designing New York City with Health at the Center
Scan the QR code (at right) and participate in our conversations on health equity throughout the day.

Join the wireless network using the following information:
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The
Restorative
City

MAY 11, 2023

This Convening is hosted by the Design Trust for Public Space. We would like to extend our appreciation to the sponsors of this event:
The Restorative City is a one-day convening bringing together urban planners, city officials, neighborhood advocates, and public health experts to center health equity in the design and planning of New York City. Together we will elevate important conversations about community health, environmental justice, social resilience, and design excellence as core drivers of how New Yorkers, especially those most vulnerable, can thrive. This event is an open, inclusive call to action for New York City’s next chapter.

In New York City, an individual living in the South Bronx has a life expectancy of 69.5 years, while a resident of the Upper East Side has a life expectancy of 89.5 years, 20 years longer. Where we live matters, and where we live is too often governed by exclusion, racism, and discrimination. Public health officials and medical professionals have known that a person’s zip code is a better predictor of one’s health rather than genetics or lifestyle choices. Only 20% of health outcomes depend on access to and quality of medical care. 80% of health outcomes depend on our physical and social environment—the world and people around us shape our well-being.

This understanding has profound implications for how we make decisions concerning the places where we lead our lives. City-making, especially in America, has been structured primarily as a manager of land use decisions and as a service provider for its residents. The Restorative City posits a different view of the future city, one which serves as a guarantor for the equitable well-being of its citizens, a collective safe harbor in the face of unsettling change. This understanding will require a new commitment by architects, planners, designers, activists, and policymakers to see that designing our environment is a frontline tool for well-being.

The Restorative City seeks to leverage the power of New York’s incredible creativity, entrepreneurialism, and determination to create this vision together.
The Culture of Wellbeing

Access to arts and culture provides measurable benefits to our individual and collective health. Yet inequitable access to arts, marginalization of cultures, and breakdown of social capital limit this mental and physical health. This session will present an emerging story about the power of arts to build healthier communities. This session features introductory remarks from Jen Hughes; a panel with Brandon Bendter, Milo De Jesus, Matthew Friday, and Gabrielle Vazquez which will be moderated by Dara Byrne; and design stories presented by Jonathan McCrory and Sade Lythcott.

Interlude: Performance by Kendra J. Ross

A Vision for a Healthy New York

The current administration has recently released plans that intersect with the built environment and health equity. This session will examine these intersections and discuss opportunities to create a comprehensive plan for health equity in New York City. This session features introductory remarks from Alex Zablocki; a panel with Julie Bero, John Douglas, Kim Kessler, and Jenna Miller which will be moderated by Tamara Greenfield; and design stories presented by Eran Chen.

Break

Activated and Engaged Citizenry

A core structural driver of health equity in design is an engaged, active, and empowered citizenry. At this session, hear from a panel of leaders in civic participation and distributed decision-making as they explore how this approach is foundational to designing healthy communities. This session features a panel with Yin Kong, Betsy MacLean, Theo Oshiro, and Alexandra Shoneyin which will be moderated by Elizabeth Hamby; and design stories presented by Gabrielle Prisco.

Closing: New Ideas for a Healthy New York

Reading by Shayla Lawson

Reception

(Garden)
Brandon Bendter
(he/him)

Brandon Bendter is a lifelong visual artist and NYC resident, raised in Queens. Heavily involved in the arts revolving social justice, and motivated to pursue work in non-profit organizations geared towards youth in the arts LGBTQIA+ community.

Session: Culture of Wellbeing

Julie Bero
(she/her)

Chief Strategy Officer of the NYC Department of Transportation

Julie Bero leads the policy vision for the nation’s largest municipal transportation agency. Overseeing NYC DOT’s Policy, Intergovernmental Affairs, and Communications teams, Ms. Bero works to advance the agency’s core objectives of safety, mobility, sustainability, equity, and accessibility. Ms. Bero advises the Commissioner and provides strategic direction on priorities related to the Department, including equitable investment, Vision Zero, congestion pricing, and federal infrastructure funding. She also leads the agency’s work to re-envision the Brooklyn corridor of the Brooklyn–Queens Expressway.

Ms. Bero spent five years in the NYC Mayor’s Office, where she specialized in managing multi-agency initiatives to advance citywide priorities. Appointed Chief of Staff to the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services during the first wave of COVID-19, she collaborated with agency leadership to solve complex problems in a crisis, centering equity and safety to implement programs to serve the most vulnerable New Yorkers. Ms. Bero spearheaded the safe return to office for more than 300,000 City employees.

Ms. Bero also served in the Mayor’s Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and at the NYC Council. Prior to her roles in government, Ms. Bero advanced advocacy strategies at the Center for Reproductive Rights. Ms. Bero holds a Masters degree in Gender and Social Policy from the London School of Economics and Political Science, and a B.A. in American Studies from Colby College. She grew up in Brooklyn, where she lives with her family.

Session: Vision for a Healthy New York

Dara Byrne, PhD
(she/her)

Dean of William E. Macaulay Honors College

Dara N. Byrne serves as the fourth dean of William E. Macaulay Honors College, one of 25 colleges in the City University of New York system. Dean Byrne has two decades of experience as a professor, researcher, and higher education leader with expertise in developing innovative and enterprising student success programs. Prior to Macaulay, she served as Associate Provost for Undergraduate Retention and Dean of Undergraduate Studies at John Jay College (CUNY) from 2016-2022.

As Associate Provost and Dean, she developed several student-focused initiatives that are credited with raising the college’s graduation rate by 16% in five years.

Dr. Byrne holds a PhD in rhetoric and intercultural communication from Howard University in Washington, DC; two Masters degrees—one in emergency management from John Jay and the other in English language and literature from Carleton University—and also earned her BA in sociology and English at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada.

In 2009, she was a recipient of John Jay’s first Distinguished Teaching Prize. Her research spans the social sciences, and she has published widely on civil rights history, including a 2005 book she edited, The Unfinished Agenda of the Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March, which is housed in the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Session: Culture of Wellbeing

Kizzy Charles-Guzmán

Executive Director of the Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice

Kizzy Charles-Guzmán is the Executive Director of the NYC Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice. Her team delivers climate leadership and programs focused on sustainability, decarbonization, brownfields remediation, resiliency and environmental justice. Kizzy has spent over 15 years of her New York City service career developing and delivering work at the intersection of environmental policy, public health, and racial equity. She led the development of Cool Neighborhoods NYC, the city’s first strategy to address the impacts of rising temperatures and heat waves, and several adaptation initiatives to ensure that NYC residents are ready to withstand and emerge stronger from the impacts of climate change.

Kizzy served as a Deputy Director at the NYC Mayor’s Offices of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency, as Director of the Climate Change and Health Program at the NYC Department of Health, and as Policy Advisor on Air Quality during the Bloomberg Administration. She received the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Environmental Quality Award and a Champion of Change Award from the U.S. White House in recognition of her work. She is a graduate of Carleton College and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

Session: Environmental Change and Justice

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Session: Environmental Change and Justice
Eran Chen, AIA
(he/him)

Founding Principal and Executive Director of ODA

Since establishing ODA in 2007, Eran Chen has earned a reputation for mold-breaking designs that will deliver a better urban future. Having completed more than 50 buildings in just over a decade, he has become one of the most prolific architects in New York. Eran’s work has been widely published around the world and recognized by the AIA, the Society of American Registered Architects and others. In addition to guest lectures globally, Eran is a professor at Columbia University and New York University.

His recent projects include the renovation of the former Postkantoor in Rotterdam, a mass-timber residential building in Washington D.C., and the conversion of a defunct parking garage into a public park and class A office building in Buenos Aires. His writings on architecture have been published in ODA’s book, Unboxing New York.

Session: Vision for a Healthy New York

Milo De Jesus
(he/him)

Bronx Acting Ensemble Participant at DreamYard

Milo De Jesus is a film major at Art and Design High School. I go to art and design high school as a film major. He loves acting, crocheting, and singing. Milo writes his own songs in his free time. He has participated in Dream Yard for acting and music, and Roundabout Theatre Company for acting. I was also a costume designer for two summers for the Roundabout Youth Ensemble.

His goal in life is to make people feel heard and feel happy. He is so grateful to have an opportunity to speak out for Bronx teens.

Session: Culture of Wellbeing

John Douglas, AICP

Director of Land Use at the Brooklyn Borough President’s Office

John Parsons Douglas is an Urban Planning professional whose work has been focused on improving public health outcomes for NYC residents. Before serving as Director of Land Use & Topography at the Office of the Brooklyn Borough President, John served as Senior Project Manager in the Land Use Division for New York City Council, helping to facilitate significant land use approvals including Downtown Far Rockaway Rezoning, Bay Street Rezoning, and Special Flushing Waterfront District. Before City Council, John worked at BFJ Planning, helping to facilitate transit-oriented development in New York City’s suburban communities in Long Island and Westchester.

John, a native Tar Heel, fell in love with New York City during the MillionTreesNYC initiative, where he traveled across all five boroughs, working with community partners, to plant trees.

Session: Vision for a Healthy New York

Adriana Espinoza
(she/her/ella)

Deputy Commissioner for Equity and Justice at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Adriana Espinoza serves as Deputy Commissioner for Equity and Justice at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. As Deputy Commissioner, Espinoza oversees the agency’s climate justice portfolio, the Office of Environmental Justice, Office of Indian Nation Affairs, and leads internal efforts to encourage diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice among incoming and current staff and enhance DEC’s outreach to disadvantaged communities across the state. Prior to joining DEC, Espinoza served as New York City’s first Senior Advisor for Environmental Justice in the Mayor’s Office of Climate & Sustainability, where she directed the development and implementation of the City’s Environmental Justice for All Program. Espinoza also previously served as New York City Program Director for the New York League of Conservation Voters. Espinoza is a first-generation immigrant and college graduate, earning her Master of Science in Social Work from the University of Texas at Austin where her concentrations were policy and community administrative leadership.

Session: Environmental Change and Justice
Matthew Friday
(he/him)
Bronx Acting Ensemble Participant at DreamYard

Matthew Friday is an 18 year old Senior at The NYC Charter High School for Architecture, Engineering, and Construction Industries (AECI), located in the Bronx, NY. He is a member of DreamYard’s Bronx Acting Ensemble, The NYPD Explorers Program, and the AECI Track Team. He describes himself as a young man with a strong desire to chase his dreams, while uplifting those around him so that they can chase their dreams as well.

Session: Culture of Wellbeing

Tamara Greenfield
Vice President of Public Space & Operations at the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership

Tamara Greenfield is a New York based urban planner and arts advocate. She recently started as VP of Public Space & Operations at the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership where she oversees planning and care of the public realm. Tamara was at the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice for almost 7 years as Deputy Executive Director of the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Director of Building Healthy Communities, managing place-based initiatives to improve community safety and wellbeing.

Prior to the Mayor’s Office, Tamara was Executive Director of Fourth Arts Block (FABNYC), where she led dozens of arts groups on the Lower East Side in shared programming and leveraged over $25 million in capital funds for cultural facilities. During that time, she co-founded Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY (NOCD-NY), a citywide coalition of arts and community organizations working to revitalize NYC from the neighborhood up. Tamara also led Partnerships for Parks’ Catalyst for Neighborhood Parks program and co-founded the Dance Now NYC Festival. Tamara received her Master’s in Urban Planning from Hunter College and B.A. in Art History and International Development from Washington University in St. Louis. Tamara is a proud resident of Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

Session: Activated and Engaged Citizenry

Elizabeth Hamby
(she/her)
Director of Civic Engagement at the NYC Department of City Planning

Elizabeth Hamby is an artist who serves as the Director of Civic Engagement at the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP). Elizabeth works with staff from across DCP as well as agency and community partners to build civic literacy, spark collective imagination and strengthen relationships between New Yorkers and their government. She has spent more than a decade in public service, working as a “naturally occurring artist in residence.” She has created arts-based tools, events, and cultural strategies to activate public space and help people work together.

Session: Opening Plenary

Lindsay Harkema, AIA
(she/her)
Founding Member of WIP Collaborative

Lindsay Harkema is an architect, educator, and organizer. She is the founder of the feminist design collective WIP: Work In Progress | Women In Practice, and a founding member of WIP Collaborative. Her design, research, and teaching projects engage urban architecture and the public realm and aim to transform conventions of architecture practice by centering care, equity, advocacy, and co-creation. Lindsay’s design works and writing have been featured by Metropolis, Architect’s Newspaper, Madame Architect, Cultured, Curbed, Fast Company, Citygroup, Design Philadelphia, Blank Space, Bracket Magazine, Project Journal, and the Tallinn Architecture Biennale. Her collaborative projects have received support from the New York State Council of the Arts and the Design Trust for Public Space. She teaches at the Spitzer School of Architecture at the City College of New York and Barnard College. She is a registered architect in the state of New York and NCARB certified.

Session: A Vision for a Healthy New York

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Session: Opening Plenary
Jen Hughes  
(Senior Advisor to the Chair on Partnerships, Expansion, & Innovation at the National Endowment of the Arts)

Jen Hughes is responsible for supporting the chair’s strategic vision by advancing partnerships with federal agencies and philanthropy to extend the mission and reach of the NEA. In this position, she assists the chair in the development and implementation of key programmatic priorities that elevate the role of arts, culture, and design in advancing the well-being of communities and individuals.

Since 2011, Hughes has held multiple positions at the NEA, most recently serving as the director of design and creative placemaking. As director, she led the evolution of the agency’s Our Town grant program and launched the Creative Placemaking Technical Assistance Program to offer more expansive support for grantees in executing NEA-funded projects. She has helped to broaden the offerings of the Mayors’ Institute on City Design and Citizens’ Institute on Rural Design, two key leadership initiatives at the NEA. She’s held prior agency positions as community solutions specialist and design specialist, playing a significant role in forging partnerships across federal and local government, and in helping to shape the agency’s design investments.

Trained as an urban planner, Hughes previously worked for the District of Columbia government. She received a B.S. in management from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and a master’s degree in city planning from University of California, Berkeley.

Session: Culture of Wellbeing

Nathan Kensinger  
(Photojournalist)

Nathan Kensinger is a Brooklyn based photographer, filmmaker, and journalist whose work explores hidden urban landscapes, post-industrial ecologies, forgotten waterways, environmental contamination, and coastal communities endangered by sea level rise and climate change.

Over the past 15 years, he has created a series of photo essays, documentary films, public arts projects, and video installations about New York City’s changing waterfront. His work has been exhibited at the Museum of the City of New York, Queens Museum, Brooklyn Museum, Staten Island Museum, Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts, and in numerous galleries, and his films have screened at museums and film festivals worldwide, including the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), Danish Film Institute in Copenhagen, DOC NYC, Slamdance, and Rooftop Films.

His work has been featured by The New Yorker, New York Times, PBS NewsHour, National Public Radio, and Wall Street Journal. In 2021, Kensinger was selected as one of Filmmaker Magazine’s “25 New Faces In Independent Film” for his films investigating environmental cleanups and the impacts of climate change in New York City. He previously wrote a column of photo essays about the city’s waterfront neighborhoods for Curbed/Vox Media from 2012 to 2020, and is currently an environmental journalist, with bylines appearing at Gothamist/WNYC, New York City’s public radio station.

Session: Environmental Change and Justice

Kim Kessler  
(Assistant Commissioner at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene)

Kim Kessler is the Assistant Commissioner for the Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention, within the Center for Health Equity and Community Wellness, at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. At the Health Department, she leads an interdisciplinary team focused on addressing chronic disease through policies, programs, communications, and research aimed at shifting environments, changing systems, and advancing health equity. Prior to joining the Department of Health, Kim helped to launch the Resnick Center for Food Law and Policy at UCLA School of Law. Before that, Kim served as the Food Policy Coordinator for the City of New York, an appointed position in the Mayor’s Office, where she coordinated and oversaw municipal food policies and initiatives to improve access to nutritious foods, support urban agriculture, and advance healthy food procurement. Kim is a graduate of Brown University and New York University School of Law and lives in Brooklyn with her family.

Session: Vision for a Healthy New York

Evie Klein  
(Chair of the Board of Directors at the Design Trust for Public Space)

Evie Klein is an architect and planner with expertise in the social and psychological impact of built environments in higher education and cultural institutions. Her research and teaching focuses on how the social sciences can contribute to design processes. She currently teaches Environmental Psychology and Urban Studies at Pratt Institute and she is doctoral candidate in the Environmental Psychology program at the Graduate Center, CUNY, where she is also a research associate of the Public Space Research Group, in the Center for Human Environments. She is the co-founder of the Social Science + Architecture Committee for the AIA NY Chapter. Previously, she was the AVP of Strategic Assessment, Planning & Design at NYU. She received her B.A. from Vassar College and her Master of Architecture from UCLA.

Session: Welcome
Yin Kong

Co-founder and Director of Think!Chinatown

Yin Kong邝海音 is a community-based designer and curator living and working in Manhattan’s Chinatown. Think!Chinatown is the culmination of her work in urban design, museum, culinary & cultural instruction, and community engagement. Previously an Urban Curator of the Dashilar Project, she consulted a municipal agency of Beijing on urban revitalization strategies in the city’s historic hutong core. She also spent time teaching at the Black Sesame Kitchen in Beijing and onboard Semester at Sea. She loves sharing Thomas Jefferson facts which she picked up at her time working at Monticello. Yin holds a Masters of Architecture, Urban Design from the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London and a Bachelors of Arts, Urban Studies from Columbia University. Her work has been presented at the Venice Biennale of Architecture 2016 and the Shenzhen Biennale of Architecture 2007 & 2009. In 2019 she was a fellow of both the New Museum’s IdeasCity and Coro’s Neighborhood Leadership programs. In 2020 she was a David Prize finalist.

Shayla Lawson

Author

Shayla Lawson is the author of This is Major, which was a finalist for the National Book Critics’ Circle and the LAMBDA Literary Award, and two poetry collections. Lawson has written for New York Magazine, Salon, ESPN, and Paper, and earned fellowships from Yaddo and the MacDowell Artist Colony. You can find them at LIVE FREE or DIE TRYING on Substack.

Sloan Leo

(tray/he)

Founder and Chief Executive Officer of FLOX Studio

Sloan Leo is a design theorist, facilitator, and practitioner. They are the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of FLOX Studio. FLOX is a community design and strategy studio that supports mission-driven organizations to animate the practice of their values. Using facilitation FLOX Studio engages innovative social impact leaders to collaboratively design their culture, strategy, and organizational development efforts. Rooted in black feminist theory, Afrofuturism, and social justice, FLOX is on a mission to improve the embodied experience of social impact workers and the institutional communities they comprise. Appointed the inaugural Designer-in-Residence at the School of Visual Arts Design for Social Innovation Master’s program, Leo has over 15 years of experience with social impact management and community design.

Sade Lythcott

(shay/her)

Chief Executive Officer of National Black Theatre

Harlem native Sade Lythcott is the Chief Executive Officer of the historic National Black Theatre (NBT), the nation’s first revenue-generating Black Arts complex and one of the longest-run theaters by a woman of color. As a leader and staunch advocate for women and people of color in the cultural sector, Sade currently serves as the chair of the Coalition of Theaters of Color and co-leads Culture @ 3, an unprecedented space that brings together more than 1000 of NYC’s nonprofit cultural leaders, funders, and electeds to navigate pressing fieldwide issues in an ever-shifting cultural landscape. Learn more about her work and NBT’s redevelopment project at nationalblacktheatre.org.

Speakers
Speakers

Betsy MacLean

Chief Engagement Officer at the NYC Mayor’s Office

Betsy MacLean has been engaged in groundbreaking community development work for more than 20 years. Appointed the first-ever Chief Engagement Officer for NYC, Betsy ensures that community engagement is a core function of NYC government to advance democracy, justice and belonging. In addition, Betsy led the Civic Engagement committee of NYC Mayor Eric Adams’ transition team and the Housing, Land Use & Planning committee of Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso’s. Betsy served as Executive Director of Hester Street, a national leader in participatory planning, policymaking, and design. She led neighborhood community planning efforts; city-wide participatory policymaking; and national community and economic development initiatives. Prior to moving into national work, Betsy was the Director of Community Development at Cypress Hills LDC in East New York, Brooklyn. There she planned and developed hundreds of affordable homes, spearheaded the community-led design and construction of Brooklyn’s first green public school, and created a neighborhood-wide planning and sustainability initiative. Betsy began her career as a carpenter. Her carpentry work brought her to Cuba where she created and led an international community development program. Betsy holds a master’s degree in Urban Planning and International Affairs from Columbia University. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and 2 very tall sons and coaches boys’ basketball.

Session: Activated and Engaged Citizenry

Jonathan McCrory

(hes/her)

Executive Artistic Director of the National Black Theatre

Jonathan McCrory is an Obie Award-winning, Harlem-based artist who has served as Executive Artistic Director at National Black Theatre since 2012. He has directed numerous professional productions and concerts which include: A Drop Of Midnight, The Gathering: A Sonic Ringshout, How the Light Gets In, Klook and Iron John, Dead and Breathing, and Last Laugh. He was acknowledged as a finalist for the The Hermitage Major Theater Award and as an exceptional leader through Craine’s New York Business 2020 Notable LGBTQ Leaders and Executives. In 2013, he was awarded the Emerging Producer Award by the National Black Theatre Festival in Winston Salem, North Carolina, and the Torch Bearer Award by theatrical legend Woodie King Jr.

Session: Culture of Wellbeing

Jenna E. Miller, Assoc. AIA

(she/they)

Deputy Director of the NYC Public Design Commission

Jenna is a transdisciplinary designer focused on advancing equity in the public realm. And, as a LEED Accredited Professional in Building Design and Construction, she has designed and managed a breadth of public and private design/build and architectural projects in the U.S. and abroad. Jenna is Co-Founder of New York City-based design firm RUEd’ ARCH, as well as Deputy Director of Urban Design & Policy at the NYC Public Design Commission (PDC), where she authored Designing New York: Streetscapes for Wellness and oversees interagency public realm design and policy initiatives. Recently, Jenna contributed to Streets Ahead: Five Routes to a Thriving City as an Urban Design Forum Fellow and Team Lead of the Care Working Group. Jenna holds a MArch from Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation and a B.A. in Architecture and Environmental Studies from Wellesley College, and she previously served as a member of both the Wellesley College Board of Trustees and the Columbia University Senate, participating in committees that oversee institutional issues related to gender equity, architectural and campus planning. She strives to promote and develop creative strategies for improved equity and excellence of design in the City.

Session: Vision for a Healthy New York

Dr. Michelle Morse

(hes/her)

Chief Medical Officer and Deputy Commissioner at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Dr. Michelle Morse is the inaugural Chief Medical Officer and Deputy Commissioner for the Center for Health Equity and Community Wellness (CHECW) at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYCDOHMH) where she leads the agency’s work in bridging public health and health care to reduce health inequities, guiding CHECW’s place-based and cross-cutting health equity programs, and serving as a key liaison to clinicians and clinical leaders across New York City.

Dr. Morse is an internal medicine and public health doctor who works to achieve health equity through global solidarity, social medicine and anti-racism education, and activism. She is a general internal medicine physician, part-time hospitalist at Kings County Hospital, Co-Founder of EqualHealth, and Assistant Professor at Harvard Medical School.

Dr. Morse’s continued commitment to advancing health equity and justice is informed by her experience in leadership roles as Deputy Chief Medical Officer at Partners In Heath, as a Soros Equality Fellow launching a global Campaign Against Racism and as a Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy fellow with the Ways and Means Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Session: Opening Plenary
Speakers

Theo Oshiro

Co-Executive Director of Make the Road NY (MRNY)

Theo helps lead MRNY’s strategic vision, leads high-impact service programs, including Adult Literacy and Health Advocacy, heads up Westchester-based work, and conducts key fundraising and finance functions. A Peruvian immigrant raised in Queens, Theo joined MRNY in 2005 after receiving a Master’s Degree from the University of Chicago. He has been a leading fundraiser, building MRNY’s health access team from the ground up and expanding the organization’s overall services infrastructure by tripling our staff size across Legal Services, Health, and Adult Education, and expanding services for members into our Long Island office. Theo helped lead MRNY’s expansion into New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania, as well as special projects on immigrant integration, civic engagement and voter mobilization, green space accessibility, and census advocacy and outreach. Theo led MRNY’s advocacy that resulted in the passage of a city-level law and state-level SafeRx legislation to require comprehensive interpretation and translation services to limited English proficient patients at chain and mail-order pharmacies. Theo has been recognized several times for his contributions to immigrant communities, winning the New York Lawyers for the Public Interest’s Felix A. Fishman Award and being named to City and State NY’s Labor Power 100 list in 2021. Theo was also appointed to serve on city- and state-level policy task forces focused on immigrant health and health disparities.

Session: Activated and Engaged Citizenry

Gabrielle Prisco

Co-Executive Director of the Lineage Project

Gabrielle Prisco is a leader whose work spans and integrates holistic, collective, legal, policy, and interpersonal structural approaches to social change. Since 2005, Gabrielle has worked with and for young people inside/impaired by systems.

Gabrielle joined Lineage in 2015 as its sole full-time staff member. Since 2021, Gabrielle and Jessica Mingué have worked hand-in-hand as Lineage’s Co-Executive Directors. Known to say that “when a problem is a web, it can’t be solved by a lone wolf,” Gabrielle also serves on the Advisory Team of the Women’s Leadership Circle (WLC)—a mutual aid-type network of female-identified leaders of social impact organizations.

Gabrielle was Director of the Juvenile Justice Project at the Correctional Association of NY from 2010 – 2015—where her work was instrumental to groundbreaking protections for LGBTQ young people in systems and increased oversight over the use of force/restraints on young people in “detention.” From 2005–10, she was a Legal Aid attorney for children in “child protection” and “juvenile delinquency” cases and fought for system-wide change—including co-designing trainings for staff working with LGBTQ young people. Gabrielle was the founding Project Manager of the Data Collection and Policy Project, where she created a system that used case-level data to identify/illuminate racial and ethnic disparities in the city’s “juvenile delinquency” system.

Session: Activated and Engaged Citizenry

Bryony Roberts, AIA

Founding Member of WIP Collaborative

Bryony Roberts leads the design and research practice Bryony Roberts Studio and is a founding member of WIP Collaborative. Roberts approaches design as a social practice, working with local community groups and advocates to respond to the lived experiences and cultural histories of a place. Integrating methods from art, architecture, and historic preservation, Roberts creates immersive environments that transform public spaces and environmental sites around the world. Bryony Roberts Studio has been awarded the Architectural League Prize and New Practices New York from AIA New York as well as support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Graham Foundation, and the MacDowell Colony. Roberts was awarded the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome in 2015-2016, and selected as a finalist for the Wheelwright Prize in 2020. She guest-edited the volume Log 48: Expanding Modes of Practice, edited the book Tabula Plena: Forms of Urban Preservation published by Lars Müller Publishers, and co-guest-edited Log 31: New Ancients. Roberts teaches architecture at Columbia University GSAPP.

Speakers

Kendra J. Ross

Dancer, Choreographer, Founder/Director of STooPS

Kendra J. Ross is a proud Detroit native working as a dancer, choreographer, teaching artist, facilitator and community organizer in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. Kendra has worked with Urban Bush Women, Andrea E. Woods/Soulworks, Ase Dance Theater Collective, Monstah Black/Motion Sickness, NBDance, Moving Spirits Dance Company, RAKIAL/Merrie Green, Movement of the People Dance Company, and as a guest artist with Oyu Oro. Kendra completed a European tour dancing with Adira Amram and DJ Kid Koala in Vinyl Vaudeville 2.0 and performed with Egyptian at the MTV Iggy awards.

Kendra’s choreographic work has been presented at the Florida A&M University, the off Broadway show 7 Sins, Museu de Arte in Salvador, Brazil, Dixon Place, Alley Citigroup Theater, and Actors Fund Theater and more. She has been an Artist in Residence at Brooklyn Studios for Dance, Bates College, and The Neighborhood Project Through 651Arts, a BAX Space Grantee, and a Visiting Artist at Atlantic Center for the Arts. She was the inaugural 2022 BedStuy Artist in Residence at The Laundromat Project. She is currently a Jerome Hill Artist Fellow.

Kendra is a teaching artist at Cumbe: Center for African and Diaspora Dance. Kendra serves as the Founder/Director of STooPS, an outdoors-based community building event that uses art as a catalyst to strengthen ties in Bed-Stuy and as a Facilitator with UBW’s BOLD (Builders, Organizers, and Leaders Through Dance) network. thekendrajross.com

Session: Performance

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Session: Performance
Alexandra Shoneyin is a visual storyteller, community organizer, grower, and above all, a vessel of God through Jesus. With a dual degree in Critical Theory and Visual Studies at CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies and Macaulay Honors College, she remains passionate about creating unique and sovereign spaces with the Afro-Indigenous global community that uncovers their lived experiences and seeks to transcend them. Her time spent living and working as a visual storyteller and community organizer for non-profits in semi-urban and rural communities in both South Africa and Rwanda have remained paramount to her, showing her the ways in which communities build, learn, and achieve collective liberation. She has managed 3 community art programs in NYC and worked as a visual teaching artist in Brownsville and Lower Manhattan. Alexandra’s path in this lifetime continues to be guided by artistic expression, unity and a spiral way of healing beginning with the self, family, neighborhood, and finally, the world. With over 6 years of community organizing experience, she is an example of youth being at the forefront of transforming neighborhood culture and current systems and structures. Alexandra is the founder of the first community fridge on Staten Island in the neighborhood she was born and raised in, Mariners Harbor. She works full-time with Staten Island Arts as the community programs manager, leads a food organizing hub, and is pursuing a certificate in Urban Agriculture from Farm School NYC.

Gabrielle “Gabby” Vazquez is a native New Yorker of Puerto Rican and Dominican descent whose creative work centers Indigenous politics, methods of identity reclamation, language and colonial structures across the Americas. Vazquez continually expands upon her fashion-as-art approach to design with intentions of bridging gaps between creative mediums and anthropological research. She has showcased work at several art spaces—among them the Joan Mitchell Foundation and El Museo de Los Sures—has canvassed extensively for various political campaigns across NYC, and is an emerging curator who has spearheaded the development of two exhibitions supported by The New School. Vazquez holds a BFA in Fashion Design from Parsons: The New School for Design where she began an ongoing project with her thesis entitled “The Awakening of Diasporic Memory through Taino Visual Culture.” This interdisciplinary work explores the intersections of language, notions of materiality, and Spanish Caribbean history. In May of 2022, Vazquez completed her MA in anthropology at The New School, where similar research themes were explored.

Verona Carpenter Architects is a full service architecture and interiors firm. Based in Manhattan, we work with clients around the country on education, workplace, art space, retail, restaurant, and multi-family residential projects. Our focus is on designing for greater inclusion by recognizing and embracing the neurodiverse world we live in, seeking to provide a range of sensory environments where more people can feel at home. We design environments for experience, providing a vision that advances our clients’ values and missions through their built environment. In every project, from an office lobby to a new school, we find opportunities within the constraints to create new possibilities. Through our leadership we maximize resources and impact. And with the community of users always in mind, we design with humanity and resilience. Irina Verona and Jennifer Carpenter each have more than twenty years of experience in New York and beyond, designing at every scale: objects, installations, buildings, and sites. Our firm approaches each project with an open mind and a focus on strong communication.

Verona Carpenter Architects is a NYC and NYS certified Women-Owned Business Enterprise WBE, an SCA prequalified and WBE vendor, and is LEED and WELL project capable. We are a signatory of Architects Declare and certified by the Women’s Business Enterprise National Council WBENC. Verona Carpenter Architects is proud to be one of the twenty NYC architecture firms selected for the Department of Design and Construction’s 2021-24 Project Excellence team.

Gabby Vazquez (she/her)  
Studio Programs Coordinator at Groundswell NYC

Barbara Wilks, FAIA, FASLA  
Founding Principal at W Architecture & Landscape Architecture

Barbara Wilks founded W Architecture and Landscape Architecture in 1999 to create a design-oriented, multidisciplinary practice focused on urban issues. As an architect and landscape architect, Barbara uses her skills to realign nature and the city. She holds a Bachelor of Architecture from Cornell University and a Masters of Landscape Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania.
Alex Zablockii (she/her)
Executive Director of the Public Housing Community Fund

Alex is a veteran public servant with nearly two decades experience working with nonprofit organizations and government agencies at all levels. Prior to joining the Fund, Alex served for five years as Executive Director of the Jamaica Bay-Rockaway Parks Conservancy. The public-private partnership supports 10,000 acres of City, State, and federal parkland in Brooklyn and Queens. Prior to leading the Conservancy, Alex served as Senior Program Manager at the New York State Governor’s Office of Storm Recovery and also previously served as Director of Community Relations for the New York City Department of Homeless Services and has held various roles with the New York State Senate and New York City Council. Alex received a Bachelor of Arts degree in finance and investments from Baruch College’s Zicklin School of Business and earned a Master of Arts degree in community and economic development from SUNY Empire State College.

Session: A Vision for a Healthy New York

Jasmin Tepale (she/her)
2020-2021 Equitable Public Space Fellow

Jasmin Tepale joined the Design Trust for Public Space in September 2020 as an Equitable Public Space Fellow. Previously, Jasmin focused her work in the area of Fair Housing. She worked at two different Fair Housing non-profit organizations in Orlando, FL and Long Island City, NY where she educated the community on their Fair Housing Rights, created partnerships with neighboring organizations to improve access to free legal services and provided data analysis and mapping to understand the characteristics of the areas they served. Prior to Jasmin’s fair housing work, she worked at an engineering firm as a project manager focusing on construction projects that impacted the community as well as a non-profit organization where she worked with the Harlem community to provide them access to fresh foods and nutrition education. Jasmin uses these work experiences, as well as personal experiences to create solutions to quality of life issues through an urban planning lens that focuses on equity. Jasmin holds a Bachelor’s in Urban Studies from Hunter College.

Session: Activated and Engaged Citizenry
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 urgent design ideas for a more just and equitable city.

Established in 1995 by Andrea Woodner, the Design Trust was founded with a mission to bring design expertise and systems thinking to the public realm, when public space was often considered an afterthought. Since our inaugural project to develop design guidelines for the Brooklyn Public Library, the Design Trust and its collaborative initiatives can be felt and experienced across the city, from parks and plazas to streets and public buildings. Our work includes jump-starting the High Line’s conversion from derelict railway to the beloved elevated park it is today, initiating the Community Design School in Queens, developing the Design Manual for 21st Century Parks that became the precursor to OneNYC, New York City’s plan to become the most resilient, and equitable city in the world, and Future Culture, connecting Staten Island’s waterfront.

Today we are a nationally recognized incubator with an expansive roster of ambitious current projects aimed at protecting and enlivening public spaces to create a more vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable city. The Design Trust serves as an advocate and thought-leader, advancing the role of public space as a driver of long-term equity and social justice through equitable planning of and access to shared, civic spaces.

For more information about related projects see therestorativecity.org.
Selected Mini-Grant Fellows

Our mini-grants series was made available to past and current Design Trust Fellows. Our fellows are professionals who join our project teams and lead the research, design and planning work. These grants are given to support ongoing work connecting public space to community health.

Alexa Gonzalez
Centering BIPOC Stories in Public Space
Alexa’s “Weaving Paths” is a platform for sharing stories that took place in public spaces within BIPOC neighborhoods. Alexa is a 2020–22 Neighborhood Commons Design Fellow.

Jah Elyse Sayer
Protecting Queer Community Space at Jacob Riis
Jah’s project uses participatory action research and community-based planning practices to create a storytelling strategy toward protecting the queer beach at Jacob Riis Park. Jah is a 2016 Equitable Public Space Fellow.

Emmanuel Oni
Healing in the Wake of Gun Violence
Emmanuel’s “Beyond Memorial” is an art, spatial, and healing justice response to these invisible, yet palpable community scars left in spaces after gun violence. Emmanuel is a 2018–22 Opening the Edge Active Design Fellow.

Kate Dodd
Connecting Climate Change to Community Health
Kate’s work with CLEaR (Climate Library Experience and Receptacle) is intended to increase awareness of the impact climate change has on neighborhood streetscapes, and therefore on community residents and their health, through participation in a site-specific installation at the local library. Kate is a 1997–98 Designing For Children In Community Gardens Design Fellow.

Selected Photo Urbanism Fellows

The Photo Urbanism program provides fellowships to photographers to create a body of work about the role of public space in New York City, including the opportunity to lead two youth photography workshops and present one final solo exhibition.

Elliott Golden
3 Lots
Elliott’s project uses photography as a tool for public health and community development alongside the Restorative City projects. His project is a case study of three vacant lots in East New York. A combination of mixed-media collages, and photographs document the distinct but related histories of the vacancies, their current condition, and the people and organizations advocating for more equitable and restorative uses of the land. Elliott is a 2022 Photo Urbanism Fellow.
DESIGN TRUST FOR PUBLIC SPACE