

DESIGN TRUST FOR PUBLIC SPACE

For Immediate Release: August 8th, 2024

Contact: Alexa Mauzy-Lewis

Design Trust for Public Space Communications Manager

amauzy@designtrust.org

619-849-0213

Untaped Initiative Launched to Cut Red Tape in Programming NYC's Public Spaces

New Coalition-Based Project Aims to Find Solutions to Streamline Activating New York City Streets, Sidewalks, Parks, and Plazas

New York, NY – Today, an expansive network of public realm leaders has announced a new project, ***Untaped***, aimed at removing the barriers that make hosting events and programming in public spaces, including streets, sidewalks, parks, and plazas challenging for so many organizations in New York City.

Led by The Design Trust for Public Space, City Parks Foundation and the Trust for Public Land, and in partnership with community-based organizations in all five boroughs including Uptown Grand Central, The Brownsville Community Justice Center, The Point Community Development Corporation, Queensboro Dance Festival, and Alice Austen House, *Untaped* is tackling long-standing policy problems faced by public space users.

Recently, New York City has [made major efforts](#) to create more public spaces and expand definitions of “public” assets. Open streets, sidewalk cafes, and outdoor concerts are just a few examples of creative community uses for the public realm, but access is still limited and extremely complicated, especially in underfunded neighborhoods lacking in volunteer organizers or without a Business Improvement District (BID) advocating for resources.

From hosting simple block parties to planning a performance in the park, community organizations and neighbors face an unwieldy maze of permitting and insurance requirements to use their communal spaces freely and safely. In some cases, nearly seven city agencies are required to sign off on the permitting for one event, each with their own complicated processes.

Untaped recognizes the potential of public spaces as vibrant venues for the arts, local culture, education, culinary experiences, and more, seeking to make NYC's civic commons more open and inclusive. The project will work collaboratively to propose ambitious policy reform recommendations that streamline permitting and insurance requirements. To do so, *Untaped* will conduct extensive research on how local regulations limit small organizations' ability to use public space. The group will also

review case studies on how cities across the country approach permitting and liability. Additionally, a pioneering study will be completed to measure the impact of public space programming on New York's economy and social fabric. This research will inform a set of policy recommendations to benefit New Yorkers from every borough.

"Public spaces are vital places where New Yorkers feel connected to their city and each other," said **Executive Director of the Design Trust for Public Space Matthew Clarke**. "Community members deserve clarity and agency in deciding how they can leverage these spaces to benefit their neighborhoods. The *Untaped* project is a call to action to city leaders to dismantle the status quo and open up public spaces for all."

"City Parks Foundation is thrilled to be able to contribute our expertise in outdoor programming and in supporting New Yorkers interested in improving and activating their local parks and open spaces," said **City Parks Foundation Executive Director Heather Lubov**, "As the administrator of the NYC Green Fund, which is helping to support this work, and as the private partner with NYC Parks in Partnerships for Parks' community engagement efforts, we are excited to be a pro-bono partner for *Untaped* to help make it easier for the many dedicated community park groups with whom we work to bring more free programming and activations to New Yorkers in their own neighborhoods."

"We are thrilled to collaborate with the Design Trust for Public Space on these transformative efforts to enhance and activate public spaces throughout New York City, ensuring they serve as vibrant, inclusive hubs for all," said **Trust for Public Land Associate Vice President, Parks Initiative and 10-Minute Walk Program, Bianca Clarke**. "At Trust for Public Land, we are dedicated to bringing the joys and benefits of the outdoors to everyone, believing in the power of parks to enrich lives, create climate resilience, improve health, and advance equity. Through our Park Equity Communities of Practice, we are excited to work with our field teams and partners nationwide to bring broad perspectives into these critical discussions."

"Public Space Partners are critical to New York City's goal of activating our vibrant and beautiful public spaces," said **Chief Public Realm Officer Ya-Ting Liu**. "Under the Adams' Administration, we are proud to be working closely with partners to cut red tape to make it easier for our partners to partner with us. We look forward to the Design Trust for Public Space's *Untaped* coalition as they identify additional opportunities and offer new recommendations on how we can work together to make city government work better for all New Yorkers."

"Our shared public spaces offer venues for community, celebration, and connection with nature. With approximately 24,000 events permitted by NYC Parks each year, we are committed to ensuring our public greenspaces support the diverse ways that New Yorkers enjoy our parks," said **NYC Parks Commissioner Sue Donoghue**. "We are proud to work with over 1,000 partner groups and stakeholders to support our Citywide Parks Network with technical assistance, resources, and shared best practices, and we look forward to collaborating with the Design Trust to enhance that support for all community stakeholders."

“Creating safe, clean and welcoming shared public spaces is critical to strengthening our neighborhoods, building community and driving foot traffic to local small businesses,” said **Uptown Grand Central Director Carey King**. “We’re grateful for this opportunity to share our experiences as a small but growing nonprofit in East Harlem, and know that this collaboration will improve procedures and policies for neighborhoods citywide.”

“Staten Island is home to a lively cultural community that currently lacks public spaces for performances, art exhibitions, and community events,” said **Executive Director of Alice Austen House Victoria Munro**. “My vision for Alice Austen Park is to create an inclusive, barrier-free space that welcomes everyone and serves as a vital cultural hub for our neighborhood and beyond.”

"This work is so vital to the flourishing of the hundreds of communities that make up New York City," **Queensboro Dance Festival Founding Executive Director Karesia Batan**. "It's clear the most palpable impact happens on the ground, and we are excited to help uplift this model."

“The Brownsville Community Justice Center is excited to join like-minded organizations alongside Design Trust for Public Space to continue to support safe and vibrant public spaces in our communities,” said **Senior Program Manager of Placekeeping & Community Initiatives at the Brownsville Community Justice Center Mallory Thatch**. “*Untaped* is a great opportunity to analyze and rethink the current regulatory processes surrounding activating public spaces. We’re thankful to be included in this process and eager to connect with the coalition to think outside the tape.”

This project, grounded in the learnings and coalitions built as part of Design Trust’s [Turnout NYC](#) and [Neighborhood Commons](#) initiatives, will be guided by a network of community partners that regularly produce public space programming. *Untaped* will also be bringing on four project fellows. Design Trust will be hiring four Fellows to lead the project work, including a Public Space Management Fellow, an Economic Policy Fellow, a Legal Policy Fellow, and a User Experience Design Fellow. Interested applicants can learn more and apply [here](#) by September 9th.

Untaped project spokespeople are available for further comment. **Please contact Alexa Mauzy-Lewis** (amauzy@designtrust.org) to coordinate. Learn more about the project’s goals and activities [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. In our 28-year history, we've taken on over 40 projects across all five boroughs with project partners including city agencies, community groups, and private sector experts, inspiring replicable models for urban issues and advancing the role of public space as a driver of long-term equity and social justice globally.

About Trust for Public Land

[Trust for Public Land](#) (TPL) is a national nonprofit that works to connect everyone to the benefits and joys of the outdoors. As a leader in equitable access to the outdoors, TPL works with communities to create parks and protect public land where they are needed most. Since 1972, TPL has protected 4 million acres of public land; created 5,420 parks and trails, and over 200 Community Schoolyards® projects; and raised \$94 billion in public funding for parks and public lands.

About City Parks Foundation

At [City Parks Foundation](#), we are dedicated to invigorating and transforming parks into dynamic, vibrant centers of urban life through sports, arts, community building and education programs for all New Yorkers. Our programs — located in more than 300 parks, recreation centers and public schools across New York City — reach over 275,000 people each year. Our ethos is simple: thriving parks mean thriving communities. Our flagship community engagement program, Partnerships for Parks, is a public-private partnership with NYC Parks. Together, we support and champion neighborhood volunteers by providing the tools needed to advocate and care for neighborhood parks and green spaces. We equip people, organizations, and government with the necessary skills and resources to transform these spaces into dynamic community assets.

Funding for Untaped is provided by the NYC Green Fund, administered by City Parks Foundation.