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Civic Groups Call for a Director of the Public Realm

Policy brief outlines consequences of NYC's disjointed management of public space

(August 20, 2020 | New York, NY) The Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS), together with New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P), called for the creation of a Director of the Public Realm with the release of a new policy brief entitled [A Public Champion for the Public Realm](#). This release draws upon findings from the group's 2019 report, [Bright Ideas](#), released in partnership as the [Fight for Light](#) campaign, and is further informed by the events of 2020 thus far.

Unlike many other cities of its size, including Paris, Los Angeles, and Boston, New York lacks a central position within its government for planning and maintaining the public realm. Composed of streets, sidewalks, parks, plaza, waterfronts, natural areas, and more, this system of public spaces represent roughly 40 percent of the city's land mass. The brief outlines the vast array of agencies that govern these areas, including the Departments of City Planning, Transportation, Parks & Recreation, Design & Construction, Environmental Protection, Education, Small Business Services, and more.

“From pandemic to protest, the events of 2020 have only underscored the importance of the public realm, the spaces between buildings where so much of urban life takes place,” said **Elizabeth Goldstein, President of the Municipal Art Society of New York**. “Rather than functioning as a united network, New York's public realm is beset by conflicting rules, competing priorities, and disjointed leadership. The creation of a centralized position in City government dedicated to building consensus between municipal agencies and working in coalition with local stakeholders is our best tool for creating a seamless, innovative public realm worthy of our city.”

“New York City is long overdue for a position that can connect and lead our city's disjointed public realm to create a bolder vision for our public spaces,” said **Adam Ganser, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks**. “As the COVID-19 pandemic and other recent events have laid bare the inequities that are embedded in New York and its public realm, a citywide approach to the urban environment is a fundamental step towards creating a healthier and stronger city.”

About the Municipal Art Society of New York

The Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) lifts up the voices of the people in the debates that shape New York's built environment and leads the way toward a more livable city from sidewalk to skyline. MAS envisions a future in which all New Yorkers share in the richness of city life—where growth is balanced, character endures, and a resilient future is secured. For more information, visit mas.org

About New Yorkers for Parks

Founded in 1908, New Yorkers for Parks is the citywide independent champion of quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. Through research, advocacy, and the Daffodil Project, NY4P works with communities and elected officials to create and preserve quality open space across the city. For more information, visit ny4p.org