

A BLUEPRINT FOR PUBLIC REALM LEADERSHIP

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CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 1 | Introduction |
| 3 | A Critical Moment |
| 7 | The Public Realm's Oversight |
| 11 | Expert Opinion: What we Heard |
| 13 | Recommendation: A Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm |
| 15 | Guiding Principles |
| 17 | Reporting Departments |
| 21 | Public Realm Plan |
| 25 | Connection to the Budget |
| 29 | Staffing |
| 31 | Public Realm Cabinet |
| 33 | Public Realm Advisory Board |
| 35 | Opportunities for Further Alignment |
| 37 | Conclusion |
| 39 | Appendix |



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INTRODUCTION

This document is a roadmap for the creation of a Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm¹, a position within New York City government dedicated to improving intergovernmental coordination and oversight of public spaces and innovatively connecting people and the places they experience. The Blueprint builds upon MAS's and New Yorkers for Parks' 2019 *Bright Ideas* report (which called for a Director of the Public Realm) as well as our 2020 Policy Brief, *A Public Champion for the Public Realm*. The policy brief conveyed in greater detail why such a position is needed, inventoried existing New York City efforts to improve the public realm, and provided case studies from other cities that have created similar positions. These publications are part of our Fight for Light initiative, which seeks to prioritize planning and policymaking for the public realm and highlight the role of public space in improving the health and quality of life of New York City residents.

Having addressed what is needed and why, we now turn to the question of how to get it done. The *Blueprint* is a formal recommendation for this position, including the government bodies it would oversee and coordinate and the types of staff members necessary for its success. It also recommends a process for creating a Public Realm Plan and integrating public realm planning into the City's budget cycle. Recognizing this moment of transition in New York City government, the *Blueprint* also discusses advancing the proposal with the Adams administration.

1. MAS defines the public realm to encompass all publicly accessible spaces including streets, sidewalks, parks, playgrounds, plazas, community gardens, natural areas, and Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS). The public realm comprises approximately 40 percent of New York City's land area.

There are two things that are important to preface at the beginning of the report. First, while the public realm is the *Blueprint's* primary focus, the Deputy Mayor would also be heavily involved in land use, zoning, urban design, and other planning-related decisions that affect the private realm (all privately owned buildings and spaces that are not part of the public realm). However, it would be the unique charge of the Deputy Mayor to improve how our public and private realms are planned, designed, constructed, and managed together, as it is the relationship between the two that defines our experience in the places we inhabit.

Second, merely appointing the Deputy Mayor does not ensure its endurance across administrations. Nor is a new Deputy Mayor the only form of needed government change; the missions and authority of certain agencies, such as the Department of Transportation (DOT), should also expand to enable greater and more innovative place making ability. This is addressed briefly towards the end of the report. Ultimately, to ensure longevity, the Deputy Mayor position must be backed by permanent Charter legislation, which we encourage future lawmakers and revision commissions to pursue.

“It needs to be codified so that it is going to outlast the next administration.”

– Alexandria Sica, Executive Director, DUMBO Improvement District



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A CRITICAL MOMENT

In a dense city like New York, parks and public spaces are our yards and gathering places for our families, friends, and communities. They contribute to the economic vitality of New York City, mitigate the effects of climate change, improve our health, and are key to the survival of plants, animals, and other living organisms.

“In New York City, we must look to our streets as a pathway to recovery. Our 6,000 miles of streets and three million free parking spaces can serve the needs of all New Yorkers, not just the minority who own cars. In giving our streets back to people, New York City can become a more equitable, sustainable, and vibrant city for generations to come.”

– Danny Harris, Executive Director,
Transportation Alternatives

During the pandemic, public space has taken on new importance as a respite from the mental and physical challenges of shelter-in-place lockdowns and as grounds for passionate democratic expression and civic engagement. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of community advocates, City officials, planners, engineers, and others, in the last year we have seen how pedestrianized streets—through initiatives like Open Streets and Open Boulevards—can promote healthier living while supporting small businesses. Now more than ever, New Yorkers are aware of the value of the public realm and the way it connects us physically and socially. Just like efficient transit or a reliable electrical grid are part of the nuts and bolts that propel cities, so too is our public space network a vital piece of infrastructure that is necessary for a high quality of life.

Yet the pandemic has also exposed new and existing spatial inequalities, worsened the funding gap for parks, and highlighted many of the day-to-day management issues and conflicting priorities involving public spaces. Despite the successes of the past year, we have heard from business improvement district (BID) leaders who are exasperated over the jurisdictional headaches involving vendors, parking, deliveries, and construction on their blocks; community members who have received little support in managing and maintaining Open Streets; and even former City officials who lament the frequent lack of department coordination when it comes to the planning and implementation of street, plaza, and park improvement projects.

It is clear that New York City needs a better, more coordinated vision for the public realm. Our city's future success, even its survival, depends on it.

Systems, Access, and Comfort

Who is the Public Realm Designed For?

Today I came to my spot and there was a planter there. What if mobile vendors like me were recognized more for their contribution to street life?



I love my park, but the seats are all in shadow or direct sun. Can't we design our public spaces to be more comfortable year-round?



Where does this bike lane go? Didn't anyone think about how people would make this connection safely?



The Impact of a Better Managed Public Realm

Improving the way that we design and manage the public realm would have numerous benefits for public health, climate change, economic growth, mobility, and government efficiency. As many of these are articulated in our previous publications, the purpose of the *Blueprint* is not to go into great depth on such benefits. However, as the Adams administration and its priorities take shape, there are several that should be underscored.

First, a better designed and managed public realm will save lives. For example, it has been proven that Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) tends to lead to reductions in criminal activity. The Deputy Mayor would facilitate CPTED strategies such as the planting of trees and shrubs, use of better lighting, and incentivizing pedestrian and bicycle traffic in streets.

“One of the things I’ve learned is that people think this is a seminal moment and we can really change the future and change how we do things, how we conduct ourselves, and how we use public space.”

– Samuel I. Schwartz, PE, Founder and CEO of Sam Schwartz Consulting, LLC

A more equitable public realm will also improve public health. According to the Trust for Public Land’s 2021 *Park Equity Plan for New York City*, communities of color have 34 percent less park space per person within a 10-minute walk compared to white communities, and low-income communities have 21 percent less than high-income communities. Unsurprisingly, these lower-income communities of color also have higher rates of obesity, diabetes, depression, and metabolic disorders. A Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm would take a more holistic approach to public space equity than agencies have on their own.

A vibrant and well-managed public realm will also expand arts, culture, and commerce. Over the course of the pandemic, the City’s Open Restaurants and Open Culture programs have been a boon to retail businesses and public programming. The Deputy Mayor would continue to expand these innovative uses of public space, increasing the quality of life of our city and its ability to attract jobs and talent.

Finally, the longevity of a Public Realm Plan would help ensure that design, equity, and other public realm goals endure across administrations. In the same way that the City’s *Comprehensive Waterfront Plan* provides predictability and vision for new administrations and their staff regarding the future of the waterfront, a new Public Realm Plan would provide continuity for departments and their staff.



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THE PUBLIC REALM'S OVERSIGHT

New York City government is organized under the New York City Charter and consists of three branches: the judicial, legislative, and executive branches. The judicial branch consists of the New York State Unified Court System, which handles civil and criminal legal matters. The legislative branch is controlled by the city council, a 51-member elected body that introduces and passes local laws contained in the City's Administrative Code. The city council also monitors agencies to ensure they are effective, reviews and makes decisions on land use applications, and negotiates the City's budget with the mayor and approves its adoption.

City council members also nominate half of their district's community board members. Community boards are local representative bodies that advise on land use and zoning issues, participate in the City's budget process, and address service delivery through District Needs Statements. There are 59 community boards in the city.

The executive branch is controlled by the mayor, who sets the agenda for the City and its finances. The executive branch includes the public advocate and the comptroller, who are first and second in line, respectively, to succeed the mayor should they become unable to serve.

The public advocate reviews and investigates complaints about City services, assesses whether agencies are responsive to the public, and recommends improvements to agency programs. The comptroller advises the mayor, city council, and the public of the City's financial condition and makes recommendations regarding fiscal policies, the budget, and agency programs and operations. The executive branch also includes five borough presidents who help prepare the annual budget,

review and comment on major land use decisions, monitor and modify the delivery of city services, and engage in strategic planning for their boroughs.

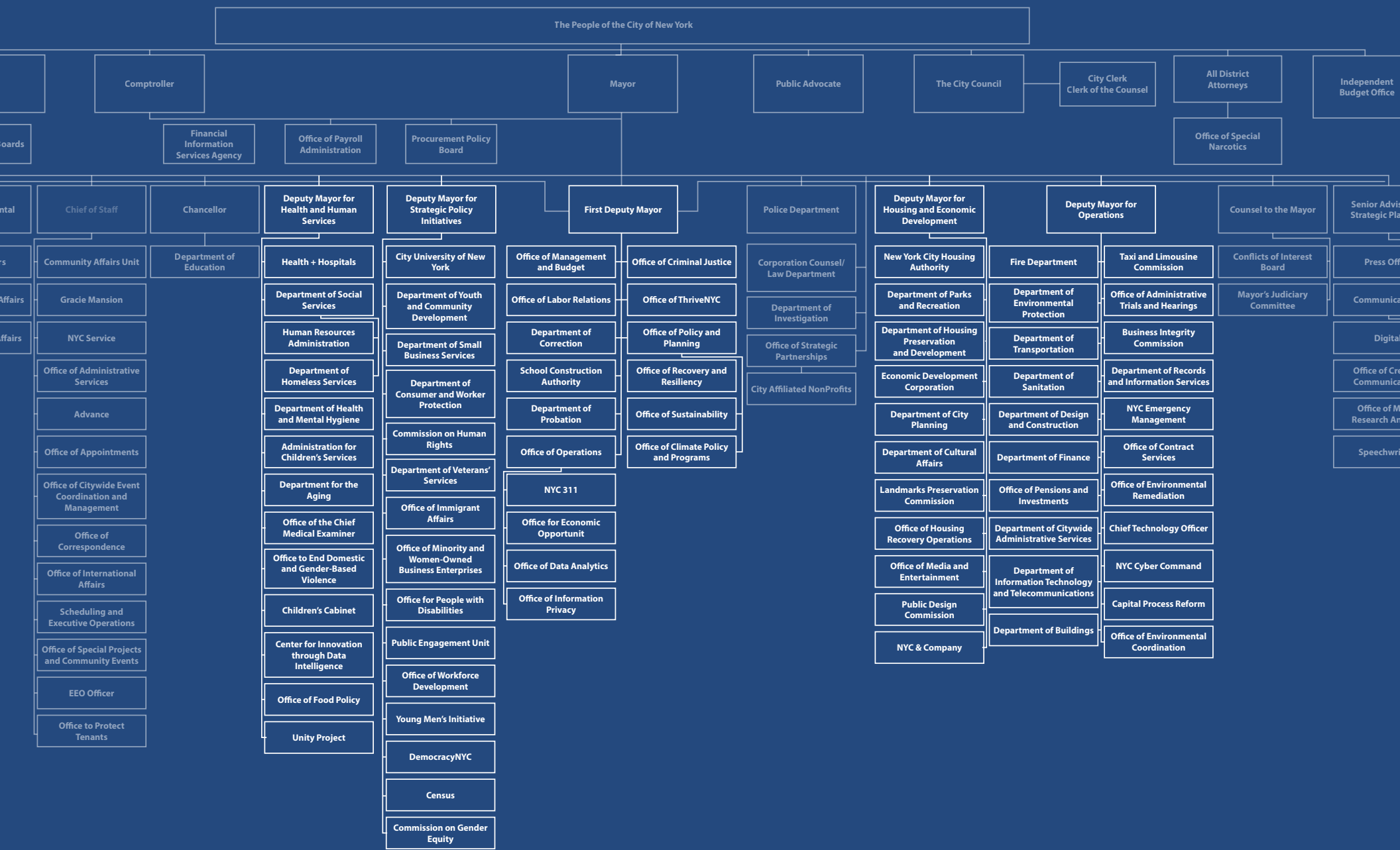
While the public advocate, comptroller, and borough presidents are independently elected, the New York City Charter empowers the mayor to appoint one or more deputy mayors to oversee mayoral offices. The mayor also appoints the commissioners of Charter-mandated agencies (herein also referred to as "departments") who report to deputy mayors, and presides over numerous affiliated boards and commissions. In other words, it is entirely up to the mayor to decide on the number and titles of deputy mayors and the groupings of agencies they oversee. Because the Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm would fall under the authority of the mayor, the executive branch is the primary focus of the *Blueprint*.

The de Blasio administration had five deputy mayors, four of whom operated under the direction of the First Deputy Mayor. These were the Deputy Mayors for Health and Human Services, Housing and Economic Development, Operations, and Strategic Policy Initiatives. Each of these deputy mayors oversaw between four and nine departments as well as about 10 offices, cabinets, commissions, units, and other bodies and initiatives. The First Deputy Mayor also manages its own departments and offices.

There are five City departments with ownership and operating authority over the vast majority of New York City's non-building, public land area. They are the Departments Education (DOE), Environmental Protection (DEP), Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks), Transportation

New York City Organizational Chart

Deputy Mayors of the de Blasio Administration



(DOT), and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). Often these agencies have shared jurisdiction over public land, such as the joint responsibility of NYC Parks and DOE to manage certain playgrounds.

However, the real breadth of responsibility for the public realm spans the mayor's entire administration. In addition to these five agencies, there are more than a dozen departments and commissions that are responsible for planning, zoning, reviewing, permitting, and constructing public spaces or specific public realm infrastructure such as outdoor seating, fire hydrants, trash receptacles, and Wi-Fi kiosks. The core work of at least half a dozen mayoral offices also involves planning and strategizing around the use of public space. That is not to mention the countless State and federal agencies and authorities, BIDs, private property owners, and community partners that own or co-manage public spaces or other public realm infrastructure. In all, a patchwork of more than 25 governmental and non-governmental entities oversee some aspect of our public realm.

Without central direction, however, these players act without a cohesive strategy for the public realm and siloed efforts work toward varying, if not contradictory goals. This causes confusion, conflict, and even inaction.

Throughout the five boroughs, sidewalks and bike lanes are routinely blocked by freight delivery, construction, garbage trucks, and police vehicles, with no strategic coordination of how these closures taken together may affect street life on a given block. Street vendors lack sufficient dedicated space and frequently experience harassment as a result. Even in some of the most popular programs to come on board since the pandemic—like

Open Streets—there has been considerable disagreement about best practices in managing these reimagined public spaces, including questions as basic as which ones to maintain, where to expand access, and whether or how to police them. The gap necessitates new leadership to centralize and elevate public realm efforts and decision making alongside housing, economic development, and other topics that have long been prioritized across administrations.

“There’s that which is directly controlled by the City and there’s that which is controlled by others. When you look at the public realm, particularly parks, there’s a whole lot that’s not controlled by the New York City Parks Department. When you’re a New York City resident, you don’t care that you’re walking along Rockaway Beach and it suddenly turns from NYC Parks to National Parks. And yet the management is totally different and the concerns about how you manage are totally different. Let’s have a seamless experience.”

– Adrian Benepe, President & CEO, Brooklyn Botanic Garden

Oversight of the Public Realm

Key Departments and Commissions that Plan, Review, Construct, and Operate Public Space

| | Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development | | | | | Deputy Mayor for Operations | | | | Chancellor |
|-------------------------|---|------------|--------------|--------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | <i>DCP</i> | <i>EDC</i> | <i>NYCHA</i> | <i>Parks</i> | <i>PDC</i> | <i>DOB</i> | <i>DDC</i> | <i>DEP</i> | <i>DOT</i> | <i>DOE</i> |
| Beaches | ● | | | ■ | | | | | | |
| Community Gardens | ● | | | ■ | | | | | | |
| Malls/Medians/Triangles | ● | | | ■ | | | | | | |
| Natural Areas | ● | | | ■ | | | | ■ | | |
| Parks | ● | ▲ | ■ | ■ | ✓ | | ▲ | | | |
| Playgrounds | ● | | ■ | ■ | ✓ | | | | | ■ |
| Plazas | ● | ▲ | | ■ | ✓ | | ▲ | | ■ | |
| POPS | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Recreational Facilities | ● | | | ■ | ✓ | | ▲ | | | ■ |
| Sidewalks | ● | | | | ✓ | | ▲ | | ■ | |
| Streets | ● | | | | ✓ | | ▲ | | ■ | |

Key Function: ● Plan ✓ Review/Permit ▲ Construct ■ Own/Operate

This table is a generalization of agency responsibilities. As such, it is not intended to capture every function of every agency and may not include every public space each oversees. A more extensive list of agencies that manage other public realm features is contained in the Appendix.

EXPERT OPINION: WHAT WE HEARD

To inform our recommendations, MAS conducted interviews and engaged in informal conversations with nearly a dozen experts in planning, architecture, urban design, open space, economic development, government relations, and other fields to better understand the inner workings of New York City government and the need for a central position to oversee the public realm. Together, these professionals have more than 100 years of experience working for the City.

We sought to understand how agencies and offices can more effectively work together on public realm issues and the role of a new position as a facilitator. We also sought feedback on who should guide the position, how they should be publicly accountable, the types of staff members they would need to hire, and what the position's priorities should be. Finally, we gauged potential concerns about the position, such as whether it would infringe on the authority of department heads and whether it would complicate or slow the functioning of government.

Over the course of the conversations, we heard several consistencies. First, there was unanimous agreement that the public realm is key to New York City's pandemic recovery and that the City needs to be placing a greater focus on it. Moreover, there was consensus that a better managed public realm will improve public safety, which is a priority of Mayor Eric Adams.

Nearly everyone agreed that a high-ranking public official is needed whose priority is the public realm. Several experts recalled that previous mayoral administrations had high ranking deputy mayors and other officials that served as unofficial "public realm czars." Their experience was that these officials were very effective through

regular meetings they convened and collaboration they fostered among agencies focused on the public realm. They recalled that it was the legitimacy of deputy mayors that enabled department progress and accomplishments.

In thinking about what type of position would be most effective, more than half of the people with whom we spoke recommended a new deputy mayor. Specifically, there was belief that a new deputy mayor would have significantly more authority and influence than a mayoral office. However, everyone emphasized that the position would need the weight and support of the mayor. A couple of people warned that without the mayor's empowerment and a clearly articulated vision for the deputy mayor position, it could be an ineffective layer of bureaucracy. The idea of a cabinet and advisory board to guide the position's work was also broadly appealing among those with whom we spoke.

There was consensus that the position should focus on streamlining bureaucratic processes and communication, making open space investment more equitable, and being innovative and experimental with the public realm. To do this, it was observed that the position would need the expertise of certain staff, though there was debate over the amount of resources they would require. Experts also emphasized that policy is made through the budget and that this position should have funding and strong ties to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

What We Heard

Keywords from our Conversations



RECOMMENDATION: A DEPUTY MAYOR FOR PLACEMAKING AND THE PUBLIC REALM

Given MAS's years of public realm research and advocacy and the perspectives of current and former government professionals with whom we spoke, we call on the City to create a Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm. This position would have the authority required to effect change through its proximity to the mayor and its direct oversight over the departments and commissions that manage the public realm.

The following sections outline the departments and commissions that should report to the Deputy Mayor, who should advise the position and staff their office, and the Deputy Mayor's responsibility for creating a Public Realm Plan and integrating public realm planning into the City's budget process. We begin, however, with an overview of the core principles that must guide the Deputy Mayor.

“This will be the strongest and most successful if it comes from the Deputy Mayor’s office.”

– Aimee Boden, Former President, Randall's Island Park Alliance



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding principles shape the culture of an office, the mindset and work approach of employees, and provide a framework for plan and policy making. They also help leaders determine if their office is on a path to fulfilling its goals.

It is important that the Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm has principles that guide their staff and the work they conduct. Guiding principles would also inform how the mayor views and empowers the Deputy Mayor. Through our interviews and research, we have identified at least seven principles that are central to the Deputy Mayor. They are:

“Accountability is key. Sometimes tasks fall through the cracks when jurisdictions are gray, which can lead to finger pointing and, ultimately, inaction.”

– Katie Denny Horowitz, Executive Director,
North Brooklyn Parks Alliance

1. Leadership: The Deputy Mayor must be empowered with decision making authority and have delegating, negotiating, listening, team building, and other skills that define successful managers.

2. Efficiency: The Deputy Mayor must improve the functioning of government by streamlining bureaucratic processes and coordination. This has the potential to result in time and cost savings for the City.

3. Equity: The Deputy Mayor must improve the accessibility and usability of public space citywide through informed and effective plan making and a holistic, systems approach to the public realm.

4. Independence: The Deputy Mayor must have the autonomy, budget, and trust to determine and pursue priorities that serve citywide interests.

5. Innovation: The Deputy Mayor should prioritize new and inventive designs, means of collaboration, and ways of creating, managing, and using public space.

6. Sustainability: The Deputy Mayor must approach the public realm as central to the City’s climate change adaptation.

7. Accountability: The Deputy Mayor must be responsive and transparent in its goals, objectives, and outcomes to stakeholders within and outside government.

Guiding Principles

Seven Keys to Success



REPORTING DEPARTMENTS

Through the titles they have given to deputy mayors and the groupings of agencies they create, current and former New York City mayors have routinely prioritized housing, economic development, and other focuses over the public realm. The result is that departments like DOT and NYC Parks, whose primary work involves the public realm, are often siloed under deputy mayors with separate reporting structures and missions having little to do with public space. This isn't just impractical; it is a missed opportunity for improving government efficiency through better agency alignment.

A Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm would help solve this issue. The position would bring together the departments and commissions that manage and review aspects of the public realm under a mission that is more aligned with the work they do. This system of organization also recognizes that DOT and other agencies cannot be narrowly and solely categorized as providing service delivery and operations. Rather, they must be positioned more broadly as stewards and custodians of the street right-of-way and other public spaces.

Within the organizational chart, the Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm would operate under the purview of the First Deputy Mayor alongside other deputy mayors that the mayor appoints. The Deputy Mayor would assume responsibility for at least six departments and commissions that were overseen by the Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development and the Deputy Mayor for Operations under the de Blasio administration. They are the Department of City Planning (DCP), Department of Design and Construction (DDC), DOT, Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), NYC Parks, and the Public Design Commission (PDC).

This list was chosen after a careful and comprehensive evaluation of the missions, responsibilities, and relationships of all departments, commissions, and other bodies within New York City government. Focus was given to departments whose core work involves planning, zoning, reviewing, permitting, constructing, maintaining, and/or operating spaces or features within the public realm. Consideration was also given to agencies that influence the design and development of buildings and whose role is to improve the relationship between public and private spaces. Taken together, the selected departments and commissions are inherently tied in their work they do and the spaces in which they operate.

Agencies that were excluded from the list were omitted for one or more reasons. For example, DOE and NYCHA

“If you have an agency that shares the same deputy mayor, then that’s much easier. That deputy mayor doesn’t have to go out of his or her authority to make things happen.”

– David Burney, Director of Urban Placemaking & Management, Pratt Institute

Reporting Departments

Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm

| Department or Commission | Rationale for Inclusion |
|--|--|
| Department of City Planning (DCP) | Determines the use of all public and private land through zoning and plan and policy making. Leads waterfront planning, urban design, and neighborhood placemaking. Oversees the POPS Program. The geographic and subject matter breadth of the department's work is connected to the work of all other departments and commissions on this list. |
| Department of Design and Construction (DDC) | Designs and constructs public buildings and facilities, streets and highways, bridges and tunnels, water and sewer infrastructure, plazas, and parks and recreational facilities. Publishes design guidelines. Collaborates heavily with other departments and commissions on this list in the delivery of projects. |
| Department of Transportation (DOT) | Plans, constructs, maintains, and operates 27 percent of the city's land, primarily streets, sidewalks, and plazas within the public realm. Regulates many other features of the public realm such as street furniture and special events. |
| Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) | Protects architecturally, historically, and culturally significant buildings and sites by granting them landmark or historic district status and regulating them after designation. Many of these landmarks are located within public spaces. Has shared jurisdiction with PDC of individual landmarks, historic districts, and scenic landmarks. |
| Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) | Plans, constructs, maintains, and operates 14 percent of the city's land, including open spaces, natural areas, community gardens, and recreational facilities. Also manages public realm features such as monuments and street trees. |
| Public Design Commission (PDC) | Advocates for better design of public spaces and civic structures, with a stated goal of improving the public realm. Guides agencies through the design review process for works of art, architecture, and landscape architecture proposed on or over City-owned property and reviews and votes on these projects. Has shared jurisdiction with LPC of individual landmarks, historic districts, and scenic landmarks. |

were excluded because it is logical for these agencies to remain under the purview of the Chancellor and a deputy mayor focused on housing, respectively. Similarly, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is arguably better positioned alongside the Offices of Environmental Coordination and Environmental Remediation. Other agencies, such as the Department of Sanitation (DSNY), are solely operations focused and responsible for a very specific and limited type of public realm infrastructure.

It is worth noting that inspiration was drawn from the *Mayor's Management Report (MMR)*, an annual publication by the Mayor's Office of Operations that provides narrative and statistical information on the activities and performance of agencies that report to the mayor. Specifically, the way in which the MMR organizes departments according to specific focus areas. For example, NYC Parks is one of several agencies categorized in the MMR as "Basic Services for All New Yorkers" while DOT is one of several providing "Infrastructure and Sustainability" and DCP is categorized as "Promoting Viable Communities and Neighborhoods." The MMR is a reminder that the City has a more nuanced view of the mission and work of its agencies than the rigidity of the organizational chart would suggest.

We believe this proposed structure will increase government efficiency by improving the ability of these agencies and commissions to coordinate in the physical spaces where their responsibilities meet and to work more productively toward shared goals. It will also reduce the demands on other deputy mayors by creating a greater balance of responsibility. This in turn would allow all deputy mayors to be more attentive to the needs of the agencies they oversee.

“The public realm is a morass of overlapping jurisdictions. When you need coordination between say, between Parks and DOT, DDC and DEP, the agencies don’t necessarily have incentive to leave their silos to work together. There needs to be someone in authority—in the Mayor’s office, really, resolving issues that routinely arise.”

– Ellen Baer, President, Hudson Square BID



Source: Flickr, The Commons, Mark Kirchner, Modified from original

PUBLIC REALM PLAN

Unlike cities such as Dublin, London, and Toronto, New York City does not have a comprehensive plan for its public realm. Instead, agencies are responsible for producing their own plans pertaining to parks, transit, and other focus areas. There are also several public realm plans that cover limited areas of New York City, such as the City's *Public Realm Vision Plan for East Midtown* and public realm plans produced by BIDs in Downtown Brooklyn, Hudson Square, the Meatpacking District, Soho, Union Square, and along Fifth Avenue. Some of the information contained in these plans is incorporated into the City's long-term strategy policy, OneNYC, but only at a high, conceptual level.

“There has never really been a master plan for parks and open space in New York City. And when you look at some of the other cities around the world, to the extent that they have really nice park systems, it’s because they had a master plan for parks.”

– Adrian Benepe, *President & CEO, Brooklyn Botanic Garden*

Without a comprehensive and overarching public realm plan, it is difficult for agencies, BIDs, and community groups to base their work on a shared vision for public space. It is also hard to ensure that investments in parks, plazas, playgrounds, Open Streets, and other types of public space are distributed fairly and efficiently because they are not planned and analyzed as a system. Architects, planners, urban designers, and other professionals too are unable to base their work around a consistent and organized vision for public space.

To rectify this, it would be the responsibility of the Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm to oversee the generation of such a plan. Below is a proposal for how it could be created, which would likely occur over a total of 2–3 years.

The plan making process would begin with a robust assessment of existing public realm conditions through data gathering, mapping, and a social vulnerability or disparity analysis. This would help identify critical public realm needs, equity issues, and service gaps that would be articulated in a Citywide Statement of Public Realm Needs. The statement of needs would inform the creation of public realm goals and objectives as well as policy and design strategies for achieving them, all of which would be incorporated into the plan. Public input in the form of visioning workshops, charrettes, surveys, focus groups, and other types of active engagement would be extensive throughout these early stages.

In collaboration with the departments they oversee, the Deputy Mayor and their staff would aggregate this information and use it to inform the draft plan, which would be shared and improved through public feedback.

The 2-3 Year Plan Making Process

For the Ten-Year Public Realm Plan



While the purpose of the *Blueprint* is not to spell out the details of the plan, it would likely need to cover a range of focus areas and geographic scales. For example, there may be sub-plans and short- and long-term action strategies for targeted areas like commercial districts as well as system plans for specific types of public spaces and networks.

It could include, for example, placemaking, micro mobility, wayfinding, and thermal comfort plans or strategies for making public spaces more accessible and usable, or an environmental design strategy for increasing the public realm's ability to promote democracy and deter crime. It could also include a strategy for streamlining and increasing the accessibility of the Plaza Program, street permitting process, and other procedures that have been a bureaucratic headache for communities and a barrier to those without the resources to understand them. Wherever possible, capital and expense needs would be articulated for plans and strategies along with implementation timelines.

“What we need to do is take a more strategic and proactive approach and prioritize the planning, design, construction, and the stewardship of greenways and other public realm infrastructure in ways that the city needs.”

– Terri Carta, Executive Director, Brooklyn Greenway Initiative

The plan would also need to account for existing community or department-specific plans and guidelines by incorporating their key elements or providing direction on deferral to those plans. These include, for example, the *Comprehensive Waterfront Plan*, *CreateNYC Cultural Plan*, *Framework for an Equitable Future*, *NYC Streets Plan*, *NYCHA Open Space Master Plan*, and *Principles of Good Urban Design*. Ultimately, the Public Realm Plan would also need to align with *OneNYC* or a potential citywide comprehensive plan.

Once public feedback has been incorporated, the city council would hold hearings on the plan. This would provide further opportunity for public input, which would be incorporated into the final plan. The council would then approve the final plan, which would be updated every 10 years with smaller alignments in between.

A steering committee composed of both elected officials and community stakeholders would shepherd the plan through the process, guiding and supporting its creation. Once the final plan has been approved, implementation and monitoring of the plan's commitments would begin. The progress of many programs and initiatives would be reflected in the MMR. The Deputy Mayor or the comptroller could also create a publicly accessible, interactive dashboard with detailed performance indicators, budgetary information, project milestones, and 311 and other public realm data.



CONNECTION TO THE BUDGET

New York City's budget is larger than those of most states, and it is arguably the City's most important policy document. The budget is where policy decisions are made and where policy objectives are articulated and implemented through programs and services such as housing, sanitation, and economic development.

The mayor, through OMB, is responsible for developing the annual Expense, Revenue, and Capital Budgets. OMB also executes the Adopted Budget and advises the mayor on policy issues affecting the city's fiscal stability. The city council has the final say in negotiating, modifying, and approving the budget.

New York City's fiscal year begins on July 1st, though most of the budget creation activity occurs between January and June. In January, the mayor shares the Preliminary Budget which includes the Expense, Revenue, and Capital Budget estimates of agencies for the upcoming fiscal year. Community boards are asked to evaluate the responsiveness of the budget to their identified priorities that are articulated in their District Needs Statements and Annual Budget Requests and submit feedback to the mayor and city council. Borough presidents hold public hearings and submit their budget priorities as well. The city council then holds hearings on the Preliminary Budget, during which most City agencies testify along with elected officials and members of the public.

In April, the mayor releases the Executive Budget and a Ten-Year Capital Strategy, which indicates the City's capital needs for the next 10 years. The city council then holds Executive Budget hearings and pushes for changes or amendments. Both the mayor and the city council are expected to agree on a final Executive Budget by June

5th, at which point it becomes the Adopted Budget. Even though it is formally approved, the Adopted Budget can still be modified over the fiscal year in response to changing conditions.

While the public can influence the budget through community board, borough president, and city council public hearings, they can also propose and vote on how council members and borough presidents use a subset of their capital discretionary funds through a process known as participatory budgeting (PB). In 2019, 33 city council members participated in PB, asking residents how to spend at least \$35 million for projects like improvements to schools, parks, libraries, and public housing.

‘The budget reflects the values and mission and intent. You can say “equity, equity, equity” all you want, but if the money isn’t there, it’s all talk.’

– Justin Garrett Moore, Program Officer, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Annual Budget Process

For Year 1 of the Ten-Year Public Realm Plan



As New York City emerges from the pandemic, investment in the public realm will be essential to the city's recovery and its long-term livability in the face of climate change. Given its role and oversight of key public realm-focused departments and commissions, the Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm is uniquely poised to shape the City's budget.

First, from a relationship standpoint, the Deputy Mayor has a global understanding of the needs of its departments and commissions. Thus, it is in the position to identify opportunities for cost sharing. Moreover, the Public Realm Advisory Board (explained further in a later section) would improve the responsiveness of the Deputy Mayor and its agencies and commissions to community priorities that can be articulated in budget requests. This could include short-term fixes, grant programs, and more innovative and expedited capital projects.

For example, capital funds could support an experimental redesign of underutilized public spaces (such as interior courtyards or below elevated railroad tracks) or an expansion of pedestrian- and cyclist-only districts that are being tested in certain BIDs. They could also include place-based funds for tactical projects, such as permanent new Open Streets in the South Bronx or Southeast Brooklyn, where poorer residents desperately need additional public space. In these areas, a portion of the funding could be allocated to partner organizations and community groups to execute projects.

Second, the Deputy Mayor should be able to effect change through a budget of its own. Their budget could be used to conduct research and policymaking, create

and update the Public Realm Plan, and maintain the public realm dashboard, among other potential functions.

Finally, the Public Realm Plan would coordinate the budget with immediate and long-term citywide public realm goals in a way that does not currently exist. In particular, the plan's 10-year cycle would align with the City's Ten-Year Capital Strategy, improving the latter's ability to project spending forecasts for construction, especially for longer term projects. The plan would also inform community board and borough president needs statements as well as public decision making about which projects to prioritize via discretionary funding.

“We can either do two things: we can either raise enough taxes to properly manage these places like they would do in Paris or London, or we can support the not-for-profits properly so that they can actually do the programming, security, and maintenance that they need to do.”

– David Burney, Director of Urban Placemaking & Management, Pratt Institute



STAFFING

The Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm will need a combination of senior managers, technical staff, and administrative professionals to make decisions, research and oversee the Public Realm Plan and related policies, and coordinate the office's day-to-day operations. While it is the ultimate responsibility of the Deputy Mayor to staff their office, the positions on the following page are likely to be critical.

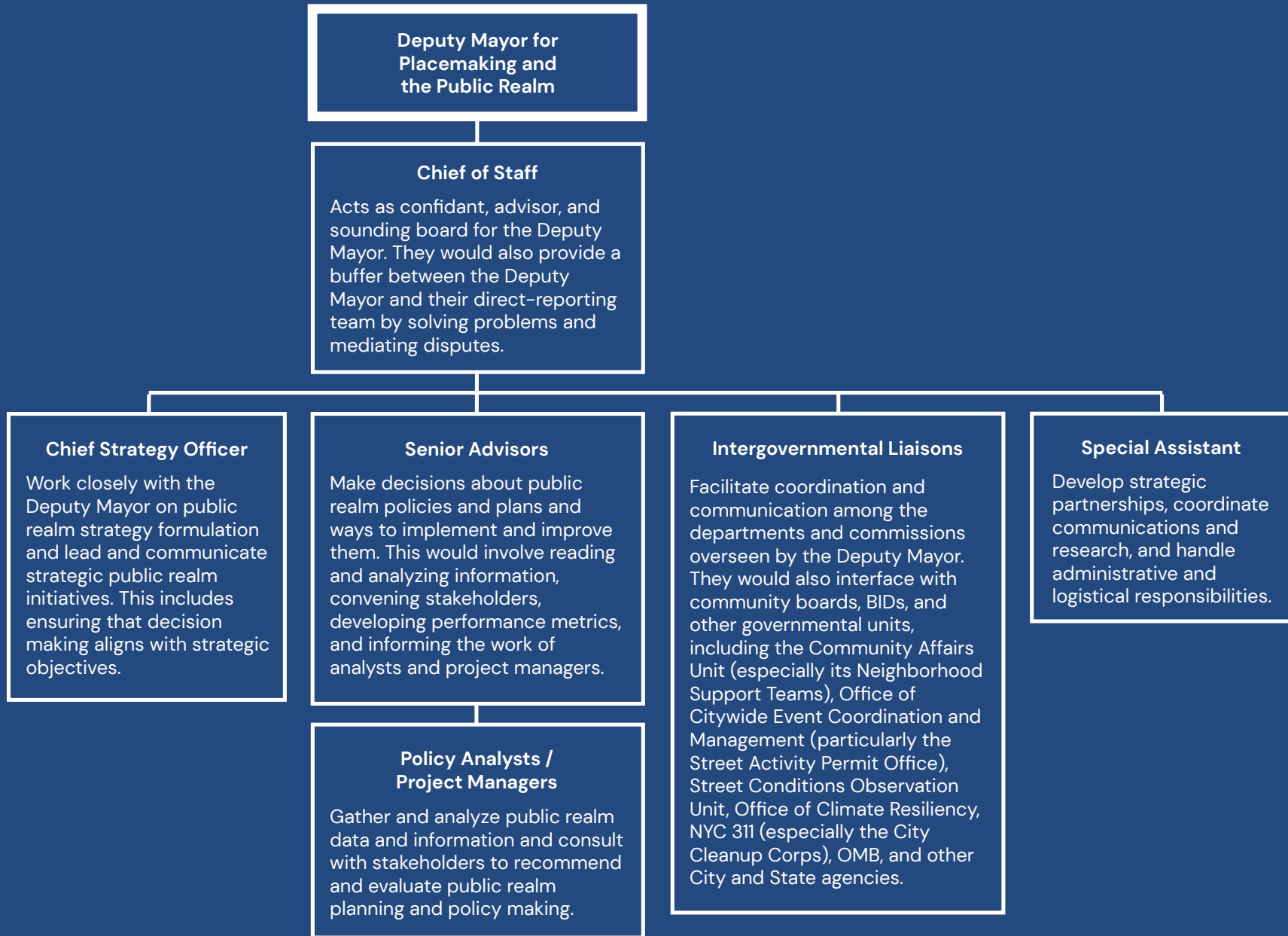
Of course, these staff members will have many non-public realm responsibilities as well, and the Deputy Mayor may need additional staff whose primary focus is not the public realm. This may include analytical, communications, financial, legal, and other specialized support that could come from a combination of new in-office hires and external resources that would be shared with other deputy mayors, offices, and departments.

‘Somebody’s got to make policy decisions, somebody’s got to set priorities, somebody’s got to say, “this is the most important thing.” Policy priorities need to drive hard choices among protected bike lanes, moving lanes of traffic, outdoor dining, loading and unloading, parking and pedestrian space. All this has to be thought of together and then priorities have to be set for inevitable planning and operating conflicts. Looking at each of these in a silo will only lead to more conflict.’

– Ellen Baer, President, Hudson Square BID

Staffing Chart

Office of the Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm



PUBLIC REALM CABINET

The success of the Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm hinges on the strength of its relationship with the departments and commissions under its purview and how effectively it can foster collaboration and coordination among these and other government bodies. It is paramount that the Deputy Mayor have a deep understanding of department and commission projects, priorities, and staffing and budget constraints. Moreover, departments and commissions must have a clear sense of how their agendas align with one another and fit into a larger vision for the public realm.

To achieve a high level of collaboration and information sharing, the Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm would chair a Public Realm Cabinet comprising the heads of the six departments and commissions under its purview as well as others whose work pertains to the public realm. These include, but are not limited to, Citywide Event Coordination and Management (CECM), Department of Buildings (DOB), Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA), DEP, DOE, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), Department of Information Technology & Telecommunications (DoITT), DSNY, Economic Development Corporation (EDC), Fire Department (FDNY), NYCHA, and the Police Department (NYPD). The cabinet would also feature representatives from other City departments and offices as needed, as well as State agencies such as the MTA and the Office of Parks Recreation & Historic Preservation.

The Deputy Mayor would be expected to hold regular cabinet meetings with the heads or liaisons of these departments and commissions for the purposes of project coordination, resource sharing, and implementation. The cabinet could also prioritize shared,

intergovernmental initiatives, such as a commitment to achieving NYC 25x25 – Transportation Alternatives’ goal of repurposing 25 percent of New York City’s street space for pedestrians and cyclists by 2025.

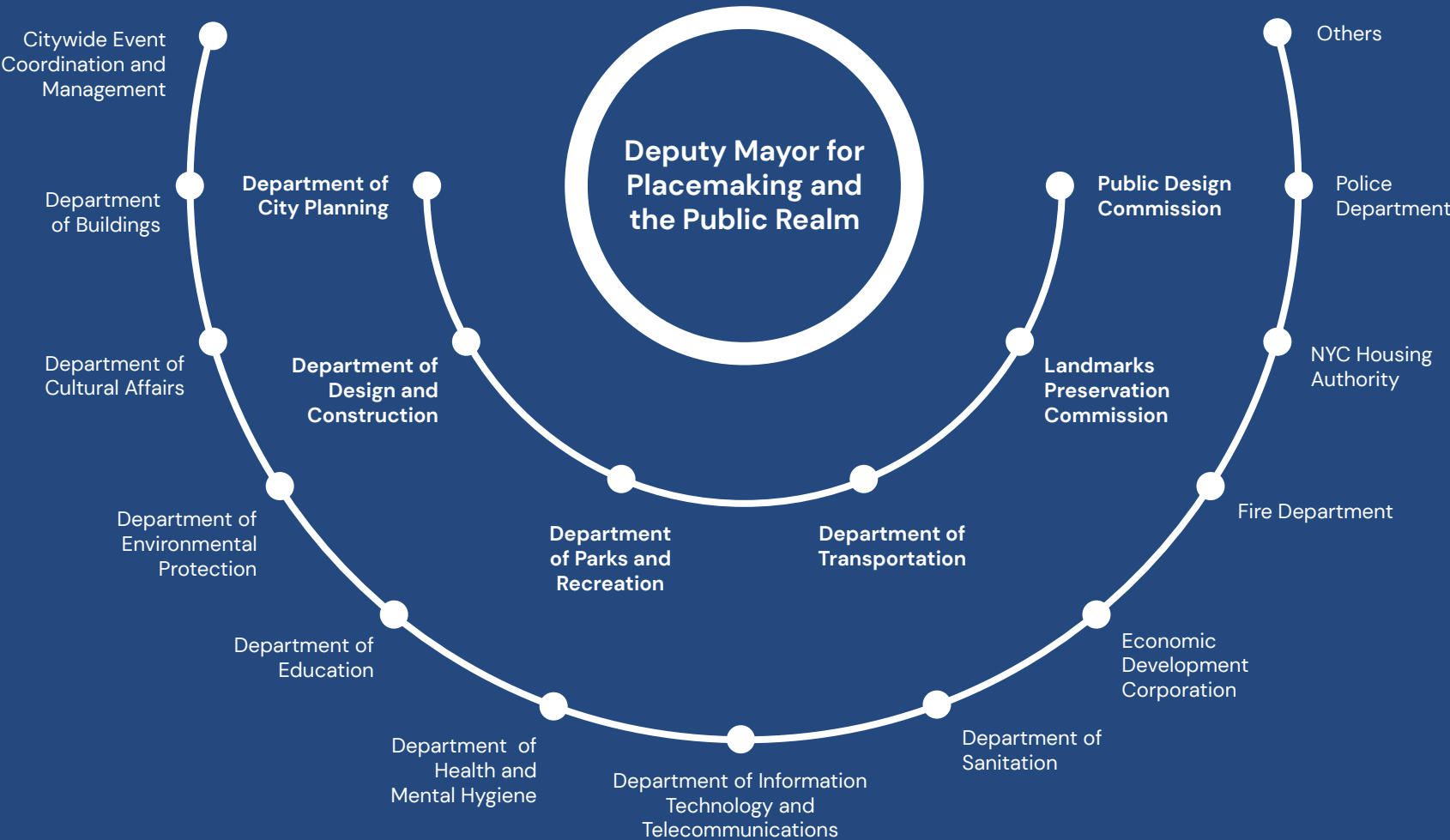
New York City’s Children’s Cabinet provides precedent. Housed under the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services and comprising 24 agencies and offices, the cabinet drives coordination and efficiency across departments, mobilizes resources around the mayor’s priorities for children, strengthens partnerships with the non-profit and private sectors, and takes a holistic approach to serving children by aligning agency policies that affect children’s health, safety, and well-being. The latter is informed through linked data from multiple agency systems.

The cabinet also pursues both policy and place-based initiatives. For example, “Growing Up NYC” supports the cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development of New York City children by shaping City policies, agency practices, and program development. As part of the initiative, the cabinet created two digital platforms to ensure that families have access to information about City services and programming.

Meanwhile, the Early Years Collaborative brings together approximately 25 community-based organizations in Brownsville and the South Bronx to work towards improving the health of young children. It focuses on school readiness, safety and stability, and healthy pregnancies.

Public Realm Cabinet

Key Governmental Members



PUBLIC REALM ADVISORY BOARD

While the Public Realm Cabinet would primarily be internal facing, a newly created Public Realm Advisory Board (PRAB) would enable public officials, community members, and other key stakeholders to shape the projects and priorities of the Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm. The PRAB would also benefit the Deputy Mayor by providing a constant feedback loop that would keep them informed of ground-level issues and budgetary recommendations that address community needs. PRAB members that are on the Public Realm Plan Steering Committee would also be integral to the plan making process.

The PRAB would be required to meet regularly and could comprise a combination of elected officials as well as selected representatives from community boards, BIDs, schools, nonprofits, and other constituencies. The non-governmental members could be appointed by the mayor, city council and Deputy Mayor as well as certain agencies and commissions such as the City Planning Commission, LPC, and PDC.

While a decision about the total member headcount would have to be made, the PRAB could contain subcommittees or working groups with specific geographic or topic-area focuses, depending on the board's size. For example, there could be subcommittees dedicated to open space equity, streamlining permitting processes, or innovative pilot project ideas.

As with the Children's Cabinet, there is ample precedent in New York City for the PRAB. For example, the Waterfront Management Advisory Board (WMAB) advises the administration on matters related to the city's waterfront and waterways and provides guidance to DCP on the

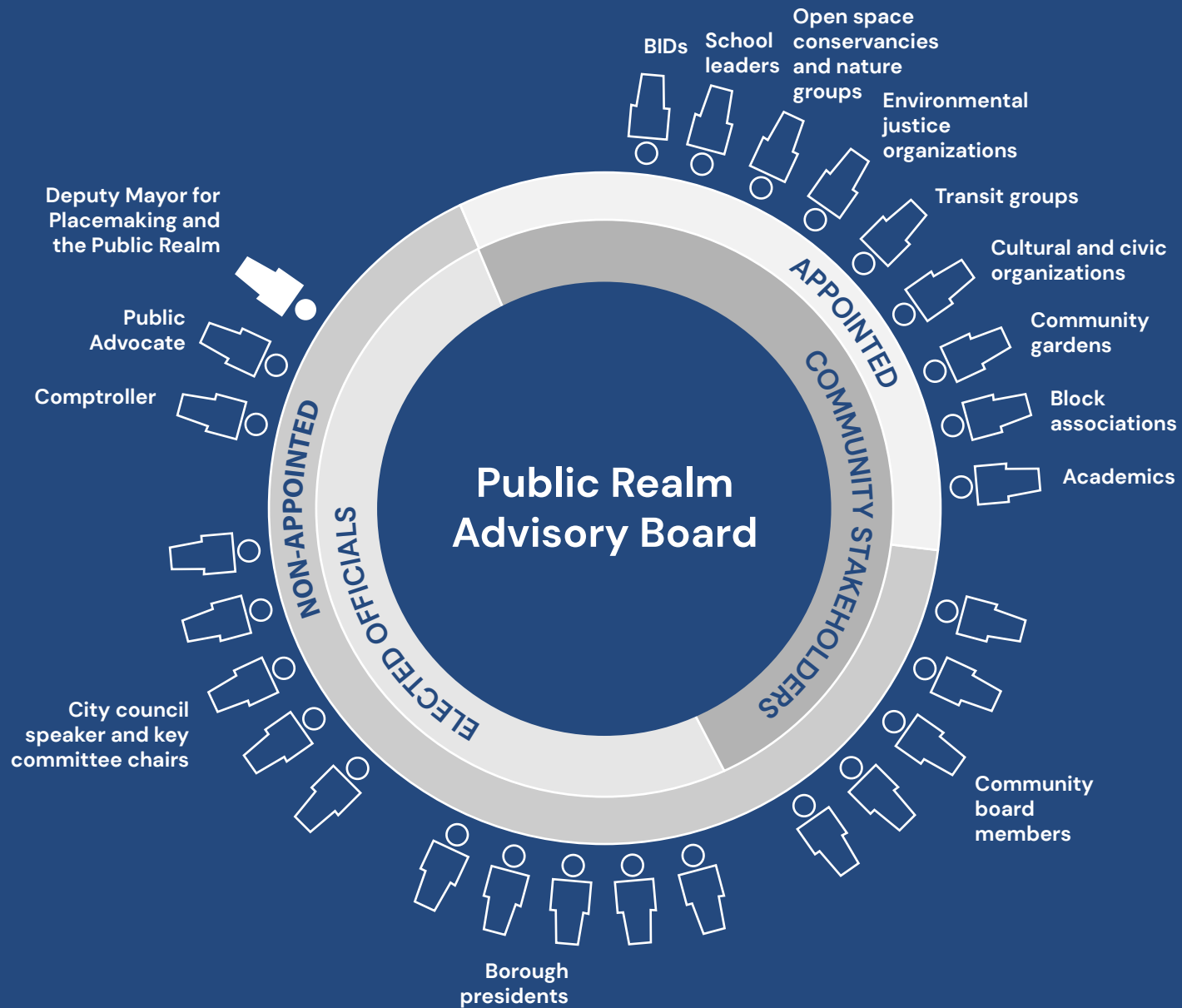
development of the *Comprehensive Waterfront Plan*. The WMAB is required to include a representative from the mayor's office, several department commissioners, city council members, and a diversity of industrial, commercial, residential, recreational, and other waterfront advocates from across the five boroughs. The Charter requires that the WMAB hold at least one meeting every quarter and issue an annual report to the mayor and city council speaker.

“A lot of what we talk about when we talk about the public realm is experimental and temporary. It can be very empowering to community groups and local citizen groups.”

– John Shapiro, Professor, Pratt Institute

Public Realm Advisory Board

Key Governmental and Non-governmental Members



OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER ALIGNMENT

In addition to our proposal, several organizations have put forward other ideas for improving the management of New York City's public realm. Most of these align with and could increase the effectiveness of the Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm.

For example, Open Plans has recommended the creation of roughly five geographical sectors per community district that would each be managed by a paid, full-time, public space manager. Open Plans has suggested that managers would be guided by a small central staff within the mayor's office and be responsible for implementing a multi-agency public space management framework. Managers would work with communities to understand how streets could be better used and programmed and implement improvements through dedicated funding and partnerships with local organizations and volunteers.

It is easy to see how a centralized Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm could empower and guide local public space managers who would execute the objectives and strategies articulated in the Public Realm Plan (the "framework") and provide eyes and ears on the ground. Public space management sectors could also form a unit of analysis for the Public Realm Plan, and community input gathered by managers could inform the plan's goals, objectives, and strategies. The work of public space managers could be further aligned with the City's Neighborhood Support Teams, housed within the Community Affairs Unit, and the Mayor's Office of Operation's Street Conditions Observation Unit Team.

The Regional Plan Association recently introduced a proposal to rename DOT as the "Department of Transportation & Public Space" and to expand its

responsibilities pertaining to the public right-of-way. Under the proposal, the department would be restructured with a new operating division focused on the public realm. The division would manage Open Streets, Open Restaurants, and other related programs and oversee existing DOT teams such as the division of green infrastructure, Pedestrian Unit, and Plaza Program. The Street Activity Permit Office would also be shifted to DOT responsibility.

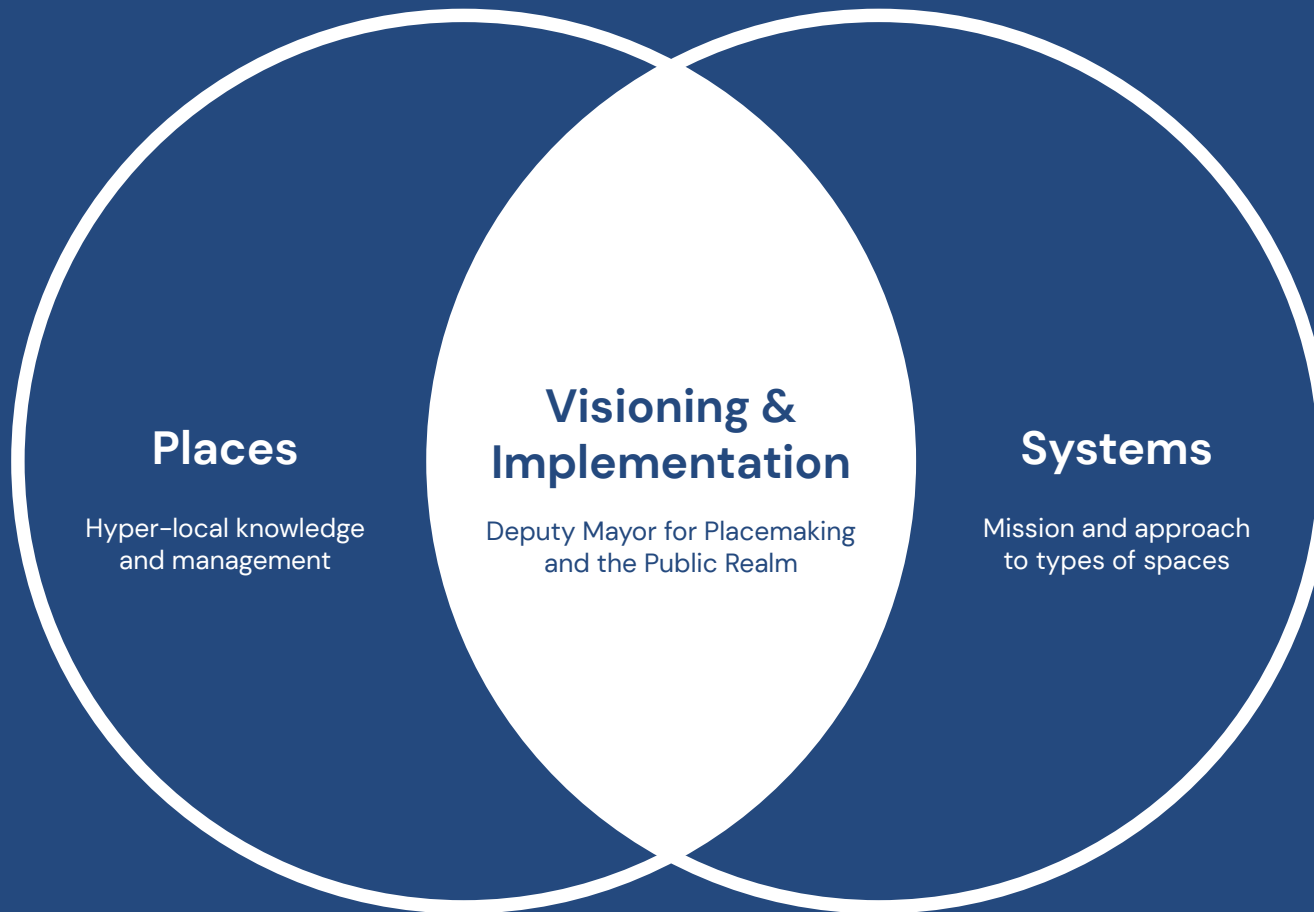
"If I were the mayor, I would probably expand DOT's responsibility and authority over the public realm, and if necessary, give it the capacity to do more planning than it does."

– David Burney, Director of Urban Placemaking & Management, Pratt Institute

The shift in the mission and priorities of DOT is an acceleration of the change already underway at the department as it takes a more holistic approach to moving people and managing public spaces. The creation of a new DOT public realm operating division would also facilitate improved interagency collaboration with other public realm-focused departments. Similar to the public space managers, MAS believes that this new DOT would very much complement the more global management and visioning role of the Deputy Mayor for Placemaking and the Public Realm.

The Role of the Deputy Mayor

Guiding Place and Systems-Based Change



CONCLUSION

After more than a year of severe hardship for the city, we find ourselves in a transitional period of tremendous importance. An overwhelmingly new class of City officials, including the mayor and more than two-thirds of the city council, face two daunting but essential tasks: helping our neighborhoods recover from the toll of the COVID-19 pandemic and helping them prepare and adapt to our new, more threatening climate future.

This is an opportunity for an effective leader to chart a new course for the public realm, improving how a key piece of the City's mission is delivered. The mayors of Athens, Boston, Los Angeles, Miami, Paris, and other cities have already appointed senior officials to oversee their cities' public realm, urban design, and climate change efforts. In New York City, a growing number of community boards, BIDs, nonprofits, and government officials are calling for such a position.

We need an individual empowered with the mayor's support and who will assert public realm priorities alongside other citywide goals. We need a relationship builder who will unify dissonant government operations and link transdisciplinary public and private realm issues. They must be decisive in marshalling agencies to act quickly in times of crisis and think rationally in moments of calm. This leader must be bold and visionary, with an imperative to conduct studies, recommend transformational policies, and meaningfully engage with the community.

We need a new deputy mayor because it is key to proper planning and budgeting for the public realm, which are critical to an equitable pandemic recovery and a more livable and resilient city. This is the moment.

“As we continue to see the effects of climate change, I think the role of the public realm and its effect on all of us is really going to be essential.”

– Susan Chin, Principal, DesignConnects



Source: Flickr, The Commons, YU-JEN-SHIH, Modified from original

APPENDIX

The following table is an inventory of the key departments and commissions that oversee particular features within the public realm. The table is a generalization of agency responsibilities. As such, it is not intended to capture every function of every agency and may not include every public realm feature each oversees.

| | |
|------------|---|
| Key | |
| DOHMH | Department of Health and Mental Hygiene |
| DCLA | Department of Cultural Affairs |
| DCP | Department of City Planning |
| LPC | Landmarks Preservation Commission |
| Parks | Department of Parks and Recreation |
| PDC | Public Design Commission |
| DOB | Department of Buildings |
| DDC | Department of Design and Construction |
| DEP | Department of Environmental Protection |
| DoITT | Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications |
| DOT | Department of Transportation |
| DSNY | Department of Sanitation |
| DCWP | Department of Consumer and Worker Protection |
| CECM | Citywide Event Coordination and Management |
| FDNY | Fire Department |
| NYPD | Police Department |

| | Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services | Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development | | | | | Deputy Mayor for Operations | | | | | | Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives | Chief of Staff | Mayor | |
|--------------------------|--|---|-----|-----|-------|-----|-----------------------------|-----|-----|-------|-----|------|---|----------------|-------|------|
| | DOHMH | DCLA | DCP | LPC | Parks | PDC | DOB | DDC | DEP | DoITT | DOT | DSNY | DCWP | CECM | FDNY | NYPD |
| Bike Share | | | ● | | | | | | | | ▲ | | | | | |
| Cellar Doors | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | |
| Curb Cuts | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | |
| Fire Hydrants | | | | | | | | ▲ | ■ | | | | | | | |
| Historic Sites/Landmarks | | | | ✓ | ■ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Monuments | | | | ✓ | ■ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Outdoor Dining Sheds | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Public Art | | ● | | | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Rain Gardens | | | ● | | ■ | | | | ■ | | ● | | | | | |
| Sewer/Water | | | ● | | | | | ▲ | ■ | | | | | | | |
| Sidewalk Canopies | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Sidewalk Sheds | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | |
| Special Events | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Street Furniture | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | ● | | | |
| Street Signs | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | ■ | | | | | |
| Street Lights | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | ■ | | | | | |
| Street Trees | | | | | ■ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Street Vendors | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Trash Receptacles | | | | | | | | | | | | ■ | | | | |
| WiFi Kiosks | | | | | | | | | | ■ | | | | | | |

Key Function: ● Plan ✓ Review/Permit ▲ Construct ■ Own/Operate

