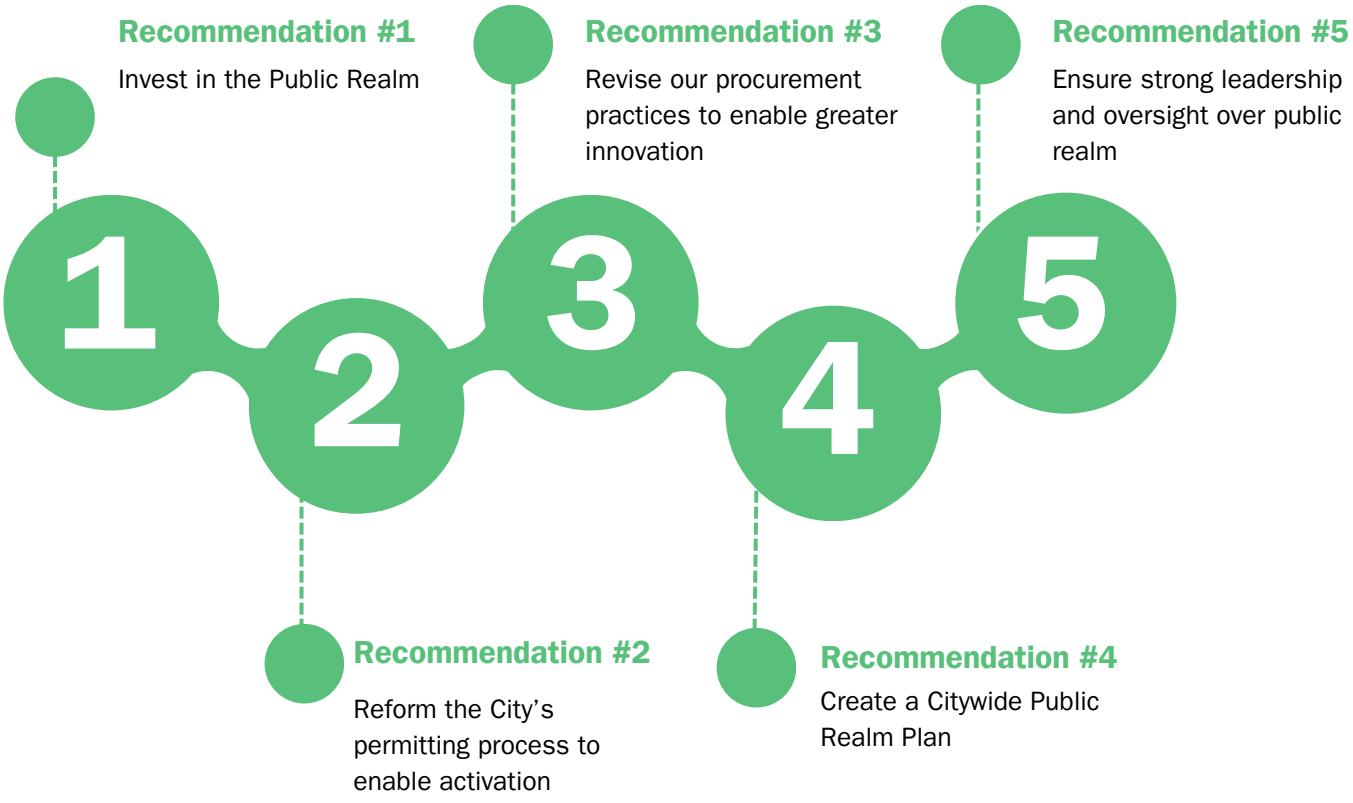
✻ Alliance for Public Space Leadership

2025 Policy Platform

The Alliance for Public Space Leadership (APSL) advocates for achieving equitable solutions and effective management of New York City's public space. APSL was co-founded by the Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS), the American Institute of Architects New York (AIANY), Open Plans, and New Yorkers for Parks. Design Trust for Public Space joined the steering committee as a key partner in 2023. Today, the Alliance includes over 60 organizations made up of community-based organizations, small businesses and street vendors, business improvement districts (BIDs), disability advocates, design professionals, open street volunteers, park conservancies, and others who have collectively been working through ways to improve New York's public realm.

The Alliance for Public Space Leadership believes the public realm is better when we think about it together. We propose a more effective, holistic, and innovative way to plan, invest in, and manage public space.



What is the Public Realm?

The public realm in the broadest sense encompasses all publicly accessible exterior spaces. 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 public realm is our civic commons and is critical to our health and well-being. As a collective, we must begin to think about the public realm as infrastructure in the same way that we think about other urban systems like housing and transit. It is complex and requires big-picture thinking with diversified and multifaceted solutions and support.

1 Invest in the Public Realm

Our public space makes up roughly 40 percent of our city's land mass and yet it is funded as if it was much smaller and less critical. Meaningful funding is key to ensure that our parks, natural areas, streets, sidewalks, and public plazas can be designed, constructed, activated, and maintained to best serve New Yorkers. We must invest in every aspect of our shared space, including an increased baseline allotment in the City budget, and unlocking innovative ways to access additional funds for maintenance, stewardship, and activation. Creating sustainable funding mechanisms is essential to the overall operation of the public realm eco-system enabling long term planning opportunities.

APSL's specific recommendations are as follows:

- Fund **public spaces like the City funds public infrastructure** to ensure that these spaces can be designed and activated to be both functional and resilient. Allocate this investment to existing spaces to ensure they are usable, maintained, and feel safe.
- Make **a percentage of capital project budgets dedicated for maintenance** rather than limiting agencies to expense dollars to ensure agencies have capacity to maintain projects that are delivered. Currently, the lack of maintenance capacity is a roadblock, and unlocking a specified portion of capital funding for maintenance would enable agencies to integrate more innovative designs into our built environment while also ensuring that these spaces last and are usable.
- To minimize the burden on local community stewards, **bolster the City's capacity for public realm management and maintenance** in order to enable space creation and activation to be distributed equitably across all neighborhoods.
- Employ creative **value-capture mechanisms** to fund public realm projects such as:
  - Attach **surcharge on ticket sales** for arena and stadium events on Parks property (ie. Yankee Stadium, Citi Field, Arthur Ashe Stadium)
  - Set a **stormwater management fee** on water and sewer bills to generate revenue for Parks.
  - Allow for **concessionaire fees** and licensing agreements on Open Streets and plazas to fund the public realm similar to Parks.
  - Utilize **"crowdgranting" programs** for public realm maintenance and high quality programming activation in underserved areas where other city funding is not eligible.
  - Explore **alternative funding mechanisms such as charging for trash and parking** to fund DSNY, DOT, and SBS public realm projects.
- Increase funding for **Summer Streets** to enable the expansion of the program to additional days per year and to more areas of the city outside of Manhattan.
- Support **robust funding in the City's budget for Parks** for maintenance, enforcement, and capital projects.

2 Reform the City's Permitting Process to Enable Activation

Many of the public spaces in our city are suffocating in red tape and cannot be easily accessed or activated. The City's permitting processes are onerous and must be reformed to ensure trusted community partners can effectively utilize and enrich our public realm with block parties, Open Streets, arts and culture and other related events. The streets, parks, and plazas of New York City are our civic commons. Let's make sure we can use them.

APSL's specific recommendations are as follows:

- Develop an efficient, transparent, and user-friendly **online permitting system** to reduce bureaucratic delays and encourage community-led programming in public spaces. Create a guide for navigating the system so that community members with varying capacities and process knowledge can understand the permitting roadmap.
- **Establish clear, consistent criteria for permit approval** focused on safety, accessibility, and community impact to ensure equitable use of public spaces.
- Develop a **sliding scale of liability** for permits from the Street Activity Permit Office (SAPO) and NYC Parks based on the intensity, size, and type of activation. Current system requires the same amount of liability for Jenga as a dance performance.
- Allow **flexibility by offering rain dates** to ensure public realm activations can go ahead as planned.
- **Create a partners program** to make applications less resource intensive and accessible for groups who have previously been partnered or vetted by the City, allowing for more easily recurring and consistent programming.
- **Reform the street vending permitting system** by creating a formalized process for street vendors, overseen by SBS, for support, site permitting, and enforcement. This system could also be partnered with permanent infrastructure for vendors, such as electricity hook ups and bathrooms in locations where vending and activations commonly occur.

3 Revise the City's Procurement Practices to Enable Greater Innovation

Current procurement practices — the way the City sources, purchases, contracts, and receives goods and services — are focused on risk aversion which limits our ability to think creatively and protectively about the public realm. Reforming our procurement system will allow for more innovation to enable our public realm to better serve our communities. Enabling owners to use varying delivery methods depending on the project goals, needs, and scope will enable high quality design and consideration of public realm use and implications.

APSL's specific recommendations are as follows:

- In order to shorten procurement timelines, calibrate cost evaluation, improve delivery quality, and enable innovation for public projects, **support City agencies exploring alternative delivery tools** such as joint bidding, progressive design build, and construction-management build.
- **Expand the vendor pool** to allow the City to utilize new and emerging technologies and to contract the entities with experience and familiarity of the new tools and systems.
- **Enable small and emerging firms to work on public realm projects** by streamlining contract requirements to ensure that vendors are paid in a timely manner upon delivery of services.
- The City must explore opportunities to enable more flexible procurement and **prioritize opportunities to achieve economies of scale**. Current roadblocks prevent the City from procuring goods with maximum efficiency, such as purchasing prefabricated public bathrooms in bulk.
- Often communities feel left out of planning processes and conceptual design development. The City must explore ways to increase transparency throughout the various stages of procurement to ensure accessible and meaningful **community engagement**.

4 Create a Citywide Public Realm Plan

Creating a comprehensive and visionary plan for public spaces throughout our city will enable us to center equity across all five boroughs and take action to address climate change, improve public health, and create a more livable city. The plan should center integrated approaches for improving air quality, access to open space, availability of sunlight and shade, and the public activation of spaces that reflect civic life. Further, a comprehensive plan must acknowledge historic systemic inequities across our city and lay a plan to address the disparities that have come as a result.

APSL's specific recommendations are as follows:

- Include an **evaluation of current public infrastructure and neighborhood disparities**, and set goals to equitably close gaps between them by prioritizing capital spending, identifying and implementing new projects, and maintaining a baseline level of service across the city.
- Make comprehensive plans for the **maintenance, activation, and creation** of public spaces across the city, including consideration for how the public realm overlaps with plans for emerging infrastructure such as blue highways, and how additional public realm opportunities can be leveraged from rethinking our existing systems such as arterial roads and highways.
- **Expand the scope of what is considered the public realm** by rethinking access to City-owned land and spaces (e.g., schoolyards) beyond the right-of-way (ROW) to ensure that land across the city is being accessed and used to its maximum potential.
- Address pilot programs to **reimagine the curbs and corners** of the city to innovate and adapt public space dynamically. Gather data to inform permanent changes.
- **Explore community-centered initiatives** such as the expansion of outdoor dining and Parks Without Borders as well as the creation of pedestrian-friendly spaces, looking at how they meet the diverse needs of NYC's communities.

5 Ensure Strong Leadership and Oversight over the Public Realm

Strong public realm leadership, management, logistical oversight, and comprehensive planning are needed at the top levels of city government. Currently, over 20 agencies, offices, and commissions have responsibility and jurisdiction over the public realm. This complexity creates bureaucratic challenges and on-the-ground frustrations for everything from preventing illegal dumping to securing permits for community gatherings. APSL advocated for a Chief Public Realm Officer (CRPO), and we strongly support the mayor's appointment of Ya-Ting Liu, but we believe that **more must be done to ensure that the intent of the role is able to have true impact**.

APSL's specific recommendations are as follows:

- In order to ensure that public realm leadership has a central position in mayoral administrations to come, the CPRO position must either be **elevated within City Hall** to ensure it has leverage to implement large-scale vision, **and /or be transitioned into a well-resourced office** to ensure capacity to both envision and deliver a comprehensive public realm plan for the city.
- The position must be **emboldened to streamline interagency coordination** of the public realm and prioritize important facets of planning that are often overlooked when multiple agencies are involved while also not being involved in the day-to-day fire drills. Public realm leadership is an opportunity to think big and beyond our status quo.
- To be effective, this position must have a **key role in decision-making around project delivery, maintenance, and the design and function of public space**. In addition to coordinating among agencies, the position must prioritize new design standards and best practices, work towards the efficiency of coordinated inter-departmental efforts, and pilot initiatives and equitable place-based projects.
- In order to be effective, public realm leadership must be provisioned with **dedicated funding streams to ensure long term sustainability and capacity to manage and improve public spaces effectively**.
- Leadership must **focus on** not only interagency coordination and strategic alignment, but also with **how public realm projects intersect with housing, climate, and infrastructure and can work towards a solution for our other urban systems**.
- To support City-led public realm leadership, a **Public Realm Advisory Group**, modeled after groups like the Mayor's Capital Reform Task Force, should be established to ensure that the leadership role within the City is getting insight and support from external partners.