

FitCity10

PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

THROUGH DESIGN



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Cover: 103rd Community Garden
by SCAPE / Landscape Architecture
for New York Restoration Project
Credit: Ty Cole

INTRODUCTION

Design influences
our environment,
and we influence design.
FitCity is an opportunity
to transform the
environment for health.

— Sonia Angell, MD, MPH, Deputy
Commissioner, Division of Prevention
and Primary Care, NYC Department
of Health and Mental Hygiene

2015 marked the tenth convening of FitCity, the annual New York City conference for professionals interested in the built environment and its impact on public health. Hosted by the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter (AIANY) and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), FitCity 10 brought together nearly 500 participants from the public and private sectors—including designers, architects, public health professionals, policymakers, community leaders, researchers, and students—to learn how architecture and urban planning strategies can create healthier communities.

The Active Design movement has produced buildings, streets, parks, and neighborhoods designed to make physical activity and healthy foods more accessible and inviting. From the US Surgeon General to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, leading experts agree that this approach to improving the built environment can help curb obesity and related chronic diseases. According to the latest research, “sufficient evidence exists to support designing communities to encourage walking, bicycling, and active recreation and to enhance access to healthy foods and beverages as a means of supporting healthier behaviors and improving health outcomes.”¹

By linking cutting-edge public health research with urban design, FitCity serves as a platform for fostering a community of practice to advance inclusive Active Design strategies. This report highlights the past 10 years of FitCity, provides a synopsis of the 2015 conference, and articulates a vision for the future.

Ten Years of FitCity

FitCity champions the role of Active Design in building strong and sustainable communities. Bringing together the fields of public health, architecture, and urban planning, FitCity equips participants with the tools needed to tackle public health challenges rooted in the built environment. The success is tangible: over the past 10 years, FitCity has launched Active Design initiatives, led by government agencies and community groups in New York City and around the world, that have produced healthier buildings, healthier public spaces, and healthier neighborhoods.

A timeline (next page) shows FitCity’s evolution from a grassroots gathering to the driving force behind a holistic, global Active Design movement. Past FitCity reports are available online at aiany.org.²

1 “Framing Health Matters,” *American Journal of Public Health*, May 2014, Vol 104, No. 5

2 Past FitCity reports are available online at http://aiany.org/index.php?section=advocacy_pub

TEN YEARS OF FITCITY

2006



FitCity 1 examines design opportunities for increasing physical activity and offers 12 policy recommendations.

2007



FitCity 2 features Active Design case studies such as the Via Verde affordable housing development in the South Bronx, the result of the New Housing New York competition.

2008



FitCity 3 highlights connections between public health research and design and planning principles.

2009



FitCity 4 previews New York City's first *Active Design Guidelines*, developed by the NYC Departments of Design and Construction, Health and Mental Hygiene, Transportation, and City Planning.

The US Green Building Council (USGBC) releases a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) pilot credit, "Design for Active Occupants."

2010



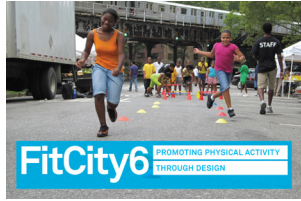
FitCity 5 shows implementations of the *Active Design Guidelines* and features the first Commissioners' Roundtable.

Active Design Guidelines wins awards from the US Environmental Protection Agency and the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter.

**FitCity is not just a conference.
It's a movement.**

— David Burney, FAIA,
Interim Executive Director,
the American Institute of Architects
New York Chapter and
Center for Architecture; Chair,
Center for Active Design

2011



FitCity 6 tackles childhood obesity through Active Design.

Active Design Guidelines wins awards from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Sustainable Buildings Industry Council, and the American Institute of Architects.

2012



FitCity 7 expands with FitNation events held in Washington, DC and New Orleans, and a FitWorld event in London.

Publication: Active Design Supplement: Promoting Safety, developed by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

2013



FitCity 8 explores Active Design's interdependence with environmental resilience and access.

The Center for Active Design, a private nonprofit organization, is created to foster continued implementation of Active Design strategies.

Publication: Active Design: Shaping the Sidewalk Experience, developed by the NYC Department of City Planning.

2014



FitCity 9 examines the role of Active Design in promoting social equity.

Publication: Active Design for Affordable Housing, developed by the NYC Departments of Health and Mental Hygiene, Housing Preservation and Development, and Design and Construction.

Publication: Active Design Guide for Community Groups, developed by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

2015



FitCity 10 continues the conversation on the role of Active Design in equitable urban development.

Active Design is integrated into the Enterprise Green Communities Criteria.

Publication: Active Design Toolkit for Schools, developed by the Partnership for a Healthier New York City in collaboration with the NYC Departments of Health and Mental Hygiene, Education, and Transportation.

Publication: Building Healthy Places Toolkit, a partnership between the Urban Land Institute and the Center for Active Design.

THE FITCITY 10 CONFERENCE

With projects like Plaza de las Americas—which hosts fresh food vendors, provides space for physical activity and gives a sense of welcome and well-being—we approach the connection of design and public health holistically for all.

— Feniosky A. Peña-Mora,
ScD, Commissioner,
NYC Department of Design
and Construction

This year's conference focused on how Active Design contributes to an equitable city.

Commissioners' Panel

The Commissioners' Panel convened high-level representatives from eight New York City agencies to discuss how Active Design can help to build a strong and just city. Agency leaders described interagency and community-based approaches to combat health disparities between high- and low-income neighborhoods. Many of these initiatives have been seeded and celebrated by a decade of FitCity.

Moderator David Burney, FAIA, Interim Executive Director, the American Institute of

Architects New York Chapter and Center for Architecture and Chair, Center for Active Design, spoke of the importance of collaboration. "Public health cannot be seen as an isolated issue," he said. "It is inextricably connected to social issues such as access to housing, schools, and environmental justice. It is only by working together across disciplines and sectors that we will be successful."

Framing the relationship between health disparities and other forms of inequity, Burney asked City representatives, "How do we craft the kind of collaborations we need to address physical, social, and economic issues in a connected way?"



**Sonia Angell, MD, MPH, Deputy Commissioner,
Prevention and Primary Care,
NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene**

“Research shows that physical activity in children not only helps prevent health issues like cardiovascular disease, but also is critical for improving cognitive development and enhancing academic performance. In New York City, data trends illustrate that students in the top 5% in fitness score 36 percentile points higher on standardized tests than students in the bottom 5% in fitness. As such, in collaboration with the Partnership for a Healthy New York, we created the *Active Design Toolkit for Schools*. This toolkit puts into the hands of community partners a set of resources to help improve physical activity in schools.”



**Victor Calise, Commissioner,
Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities**

“Ten percent of the population of New York has a disability. At some point in your life, you will either become disabled, be temporarily disabled, or know someone with a disability. We are working on *Inclusive Design Guidelines* that go beyond accessibility to incorporate Active Design. Accessible measures like curb cuts and ramps help not only people with disabilities, but also people who are aging and parents with strollers.”



**Wendy Feuer, Assistant Commissioner,
Urban Design and Art,
Department of Transportation**

“Creating a safer city for people to walk, ride, and even drive is going to help people become more active. Citi Bike, New York City’s bike share program, is expanding from 6,000 to 12,000 bikes over the course of the next two years. The NYC Department of Transportation is working with the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, NYC Department of Design and Construction, and the NYC Department of Environmental Protection to create and maintain street medians that help slow drivers on major thoroughfares. This and other pedestrian and traffic safety efforts are a key component of Mayor de Blasio’s Vision Zero initiative for safety, sustainability, and equity in New York City.”



**Eden Hauslaib, Senior Advisor,
Strategic Initiatives, NYC Administration
for Children's Services**

"Our physical environments are critical to healing and promoting the well-being of our children and families. We have collaborated with Sesame Street —specifically the Sesame Workshop Employee Volunteer program, Count Me In!— to redesign the nursery in our Children's Center, which is the first place many of our children come when they enter our care. We also redesigned our playground area, introducing features like rock-climbing walls and ADA-accessible play equipment. ACS is proud to collaborate with all the City's agencies that touch the lives of our children and families through the Mayor's Children's Cabinet, which brings together over 20 City agencies. The Children's Cabinet charges each of us to pool our resources and knowledge to really make an impact."



**Purnima Kapur, Executive Director,
NYC Department of City Planning**

"City Planning works to ensure that our city grows in ways that are sustainable for all New Yorkers. We look at neighborhoods holistically, with equity as a major component. We are working to foster strong, vibrant communities where New Yorkers can live, work, shop, and play all within a walkable distance. As we rezone to make opportunities for more housing, we are working to accommodate the residents that live there today."



**Feniosky A. Peña-Mora, ScD, Commissioner,
NYC Department of Design and Construction**

"In line with Mayor de Blasio's OneNYC, we are developing the next generation of the NYC Department of Design and Construction infrastructure and public buildings to support growth, equity, sustainability, resiliency, and healthy living. With projects like Plaza de las Americas—which hosts fresh food vendors, provides space for physical activity, and gives a sense of welcome and well-being—we approach the connection of design and public health holistically for all."

**We are working
to foster strong,
vibrant communities
where New Yorkers
can live, work, shop,
and play all within
a walkable distance.**

— Purnima Kapur, Executive Director,
NYC Department of City Planning



**Caryn Resnick, Deputy Commissioner,
External Affairs, NYC Department for the Aging**

“Age Friendly New York, a collaboration with the Mayor, the City Council, and the New York Academy of Medicine, is a cross-cutting initiative that incorporates elements of Active Design, including promoting pedestrian safety, encouraging active recreation, developing evidence-based health and wellness programs, creating green spaces, increasing access to healthy foods, and designing affordable housing that encourages active living. The partnerships with a host of public and private organizations have been and will continue to be paramount to our achieving these goals, whether it is with the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation on developing fitness programs for older adults, the installation of benches through the Department of Transportation, or development of an aging in place guide with the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter.”



**Mitchell Silver, FAICP, Commissioner,
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation**

“The Community Parks Initiative, launched with Mayor de Blasio, focuses on the 134 of our city’s 2,000 parks that have received less than \$250,000 in capital funding. These are areas of high need, areas of high obesity, where neighborhoods did not have access to an adequate park. We decided we had to change that. We are giving communities the opportunity to transform Robert Moses-era parks into 21st-century parks, responding to changing demographics, aging populations, and people with disabilities.”

EQUITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The first step in design is to name and frame the problem. It was not enough to think about active living. I needed to think about racism and the land.

— Mindy Thomson Fullilove, MD,
Professor of Clinical Studies of
Sociomedical Sciences,
Columbia University Mailman
School of Public Health

**Heath Keynote: Mindy Thompson Fullilove, MD,
Professor of Clinical Studies of Sociomedical
Sciences, Columbia University Mailman
School of Public Health**

Dr. Mindy Fullilove began her keynote address with a moment of silence to honor Eric Garner and other African Americans who have died at the hands of police, and whose deaths have launched the Black Lives Matter movement. Fullilove sought to “bring this challenge to our democracy into this room, looking at the FitCity.”

A social psychiatrist and author of books on the development of America’s urban environment, including *Root Shock* (2004) and *Urban Alchemy* (2013), Fullilove argued that urban populations’ poor health is inextricably linked with histories of segregation and disenfranchisement. “The first step in design is to name and frame the problem,” Fullilove said. “It was not enough to think about active living. I needed to think about racism and the land.”

Fullilove connected Active Design issues with the wider “zig-zag pattern” of racism

embedded in urban design, stretching back to slavery. Improving urban neighborhoods, she said, depends on understanding the implicit psychologies and explicit policies that have categorized people of color as “detrimental influences.” In New York and cities across the country, cycles of disinvestment and decline, followed by renewal and rising property values, have often driven out long-term neighborhood residents. Fullilove noted that there is nothing “natural” about that process. Rather, it is the result of policies and programs, such as urban renewal, that have displaced millions of people across the country.

According to Fullilove, upgrading parks and streets without recognizing their history—often involving race-related disinvestment—would be a hollow sense of Active Design. She said facilitating physical activity is only one step toward creating healthy neighborhoods and urged the audience to consider the bigger picture of equity in the built environment. “What is the problem that must be solved?” she asked. “It is not simply active living.”

Mindy Thompson
Fullilove, MD,
presenting at FitCity 10
Credit: Center for
Architecture



Breakout Session: “Community Engagement and Active Transportation: Working to Achieve Collective Impact”

What happens when the mayor of your city is also a medical doctor? Mayor Miguel Anxo Fernández Lores, MD, of Pontevedra, Galice, Spain, spearheaded the physical transformation of his city with the goal of improving public health outcomes. The workshop joined Lores with two New York public servants: Henry Greenidge, Director of Special Projects, NYC Department of Transportation, and Maggie Veatch, MPH, Director of Physical Activity and Nutrition, Brooklyn District Public Health Office, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. With moderator Tracey Capers, Executive Vice President, Programs/ Organizational Development, Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, the group discussed

their work to promote opportunities for active transportation—most commonly walking and cycling—by leveraging government and grassroots strategies.

The discussion produced a series of recommendations around the idea of “collective impact,” which Capers defined as “bringing people together, in a structured way, to achieve social change.” Panelists urged designers and public servants to act within existing cities and to consider the cultural implications of proposed interventions. The workshop’s case studies from both Spain and New York demonstrated that active transportation programs can be relatively simple and inexpensive to implement, but do require political will. Panelists stressed the social and economic goals of their work in active transportation, alongside public health objectives.

Pontevedra’s vehicular street network was drastically reduced, with most of the city given over to pedestrians and bicyclists (left) After the transformation, traffic decreased by 53% in the region, 77% in the city and 92.5% downtown (right) Credit: City of Pontevedra



Lores provided an overview of the transformation of Pontevedra. In the 1990s, the city was dominated by automobile traffic, and its river was filled with sewage. In response, the mayor's transformation team pursued both civic and public health goals: increasing road safety, establishing universal accessibility, and accommodating healthier lifestyles. The team drastically reduced Pontevedra's vehicular street network, enabling pedestrians and bicyclists to reclaim most of the city's streets. Increasing public space improved street life and decreased emissions and pollution. After the transformation, traffic dropped by 53% in the region, 77% in the city, and 92.5% downtown, home to 51,000 residents. In a ceremony following FitCity, Pontevedra received a 2015 Active Design Award from the Center for Active Design.

Greenidge shared similar outcomes from New York, which has the largest bike lane network in the US. Across the city, streets with protected bike paths have seen dramatic reductions in pedestrian and cyclist injuries and deaths. Greenidge said the NYC Department of Transportation works with communities to develop projects supporting a pedestrian-friendly landscape, such as neighborhood slow zones, bike share, and Weekend Walks.

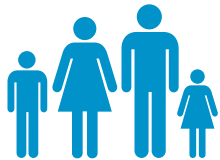
By prioritizing work with Community Boards, the NYC Department of Transportation is increasing community input in its work, he said.

Veatch told a story from her work in Brownsville, Brooklyn, with the Center for Health Equity, which illustrated the power of collaboration between community groups and government agencies. One of the poorest neighborhoods in New York City, Brownsville has for decades struggled against disinvestment. Veatch convened residents to address the neighborhood's lack of bike infrastructure. Brownsville residents mobilized and mapped streets where they wanted to see bike lanes installed. Transportation experts from the City then filled in the community-generated map to create functional bike networks. Veatch noted that the current rezoning of nearby East New York has sparked fears of gentrification; some residents see increased bike lanes as a sign of a neighborhood transformation that will push current residents out.

Panelists pointed to next steps: sharing successes in Spain and New York for other cities to adopt, increasing outreach and collaboration with communities, and working with neighborhoods like East New York to incorporate active transportation without accelerating gentrification.



**In Pontevedra, Spain,
reducing the vehicular
street network improved
street life, decreased
pollution, and cut traffic
in half across the region.**



By participating in a community visioning workshop for Port Richmond, Staten Island, FitCity attendees gained skills that can be replicated in their own communities.

Breakout Session: “Using an Innovative Visioning Method to Activate Change: Learning from Staten Island”

The visioning method is a planning exercise that brings together people of all backgrounds to establish shared values. “Using an Innovative Visioning Method to Activate Change: Learning from Staten Island” brought FitCity participants directly into this engagement process. Moderated by Elizabeth Hamby, Community Urban Planner, Center for Health Equity, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the workshop helped participants gain skills that can be replicated in their own communities.

Staten Island’s public health challenges—including high levels of obesity, heart attacks, and smoking—coupled with its expansive parkland, make it ripe for Active Design interventions. In reimagining a future of Staten Island’s Port Richmond neighborhood, participants identified outdoors, creativity, and community relationships as shared values. They also determined that parks can be uniquely positioned to cross socio-economic boundaries. Throughout this process, the shared values approach raised questions on coalition-building around public projects, including whom to include, and how to engage.

Participants discussed projects in Staten Island to engage children and adults and help promote physical activity, including the recent success of a large-scale daffodil planting in Faber Park. Last fall, community members and

volunteers in Faber Park planted one million daffodil bulbs. The momentum from that work has led to a Daffodil Festival that features bicycle rides, gardening classes, and visioning workshops to imagine the future of Faber Park.

Breakout Session: “What’s Next in Active Design: East Harlem and the Expanding Vision of Healthy Neighborhoods”

“Is an engaged community a healthier community?” Suzanne Nienaber, AICP, Partnerships Director, Center for Active Design, asked participants of the workshop “What’s Next in Active Design: East Harlem and the Expanding Vision of Healthy Neighborhoods.” Moderated by Lee Altman, LEED AP, Active Design Coordinator, NYC Department of Design and Construction, and Claudia Herasme, Deputy Director, Office of Chief Urban Designer, NYC Department of City Planning, this breakout session brought FitCity attendees together with representatives from four City agencies to examine how community-driven design can increase equity and improve public health outcomes in East Harlem, a racially diverse and rapidly changing community facing particularly acute public health issues, including high rates of asthma.

The workshop highlighted New York City’s increased focus on neighborhood-level planning. Altman described her work on the DDC’s *Design Guidelines for Healthy Living*, which will be “more holistic and at the same time more fine-grained” than earlier Active Design standards. The new



Make NYC Your Gym campaign
Credit: NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

guidelines will take an integrated view of health to include mental health and equity, and will incorporate methods for precise, neighborhood-level engagement.

Carmen Dias-Malvido, Program Manager, East & Central Harlem District Public Health Office, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, presented the work of the City’s new Center for Health Equity. With district public health offices, including one covering East and Central Harlem, the Center for Health Equity “works to ensure all New York City residents have equitable opportunities to achieve their full health potential.” As Marlon Williams, Director of Cross Agency Partnerships, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, recently described in *Urban Omnibus*, “Much of what determines your ability to live to your fullest health potential is about the physical and social context in which you live. Issues of race, discrimination, class, and poverty all have a tremendous impact on health.”³

Workshop panelists facilitated smaller group discussions on transportation, the needs of multiple generations, land use, and civic engagement in East Harlem. For each topic, participants identified needs, barriers, and opportunities in the neighborhood. One contributor turned the concept of “barrier” on its head, writing that, in East Harlem, “public housing is a barrier to gentrification (positive!).” Participants called for increased connections with nearby Randall’s Island and Central Park. To improve community engagement, attendees suggested adjusting community board hours to accommodate residents who work at night. Many looked at opportunities for increased impacts from neighborhood nonprofits, such as Union Settlement Association, which operates senior centers and playgrounds on East Harlem New York City Housing Authority campuses. Attendees were enthusiastic about potentials for a riverfront esplanade.

Is an engaged community a healthier community?

— Suzanne Nienaber, AICP, Partnerships Director, Center for Active Design

3 “Putting Health in All Policies,” *Urban Omnibus*, April 29, 2014
<http://urbanomnibus.net/2015/04/putting-health-in-all-policies/>

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

It is not just an affordable housing agenda. We are digging into the real needs and economic challenges—the rent burdens—that households in New York are experiencing.

— Daniel Hernandez,
Deputy Commissioner for
Neighborhood Strategies,
NYC Department of Housing
Preservation and Development

Design Keynote: Daniel Hernandez, Deputy Commissioner for Neighborhood Strategies, NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development

The first chapter of Mayor Bill de Blasio's *Housing New York* plan is titled "Fostering Diverse, Livable Neighborhoods." The plan seeks to develop and preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing units over 10 years. To bolster the plan's neighborhood-level engagement work, the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development formed the Office of Neighborhood Strategies led by Deputy Commissioner Daniel Hernandez. "It is not just an affordable housing agenda," Hernandez said in his FitCity keynote address. "We are digging into the real needs and economic challenges—the rent burdens—that households in New York are experiencing."

If well-designed housing can help foster a vibrant neighborhood, how can it contribute to public health? Hernandez described affordable housing as an "intervention." He shared research showing that residents' physical and mental health improves when they have access to quality housing they can afford. In New York City, half of renter-occupied households are rent-burdened, meaning residents pay more than 30% of their income in rent. When residents have lower housing costs, they are able to invest in health-related expenses, have greater financial stability, and less chronic stress than their rent-burdened peers. Higher quality housing has been shown to decrease incidence of disease and missed days at school or work.

For over a century, housing in New York has been designed with public health in mind. Tenement legislation in the late 1800s, which regulated housing design to limit the spread of communicable diseases like tuberculosis, gave way to the first public housing in the 1930s, followed by "slum-clearance" and urban renewal. Hernandez cited more recent New York affordable housing developments that incorporate Active Design. In the Bronx, Arbor House and Via Verde, the result of the New Housing New York competition, feature occupiable green roofs, well-designed open spaces, and fitness centers.

Hernandez's Office of Neighborhood Strategies works to achieve community goals, preserve affordability, enforce housing standards, and develop new affordable housing. Active Design guidelines are incorporated in the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development's selection process, promoting stair use, increasing opportunities for physical activities and courtyard use, and encouraging walking and biking through design features like bike rooms and benches. The NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development is collaborating with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Community Health Care Worker program to make health care more available to New Yorkers who historically have not had equal access. Hernandez described working toward the linked goals of equity and diversity. His office uses the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development investments in housing to contribute to the social, economic, and physical objectives of neighborhoods.



Arbor House, Bronx, NY

Credit: Bernstein Associates, courtesy of Blue Sea Development Company

**Just two minutes—
about six floors—
of stair climbing
a day burns enough
calories to prevent
average annual weight
gain for an American
adult. Creating a more
enticing and walkable
public realm can result
in a 161% increase
in physical activity.**

— Joanna Frank, Executive Director,
Center for Active Design

Breakout Session: “Designing for Health in Affordable Housing”

The “Designing for Health in Affordable Housing” panel brought together a designer, a developer, a nonprofit leader, and a public health expert. Yianice Hernandez, Director of Active Living, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, moderated the discussion on how housing can support healthy living options for residents and surrounding communities. Each panelist presented affordable housing work designed to prioritize residents’ health. The conversation explored architectural strategies to address two issues that disproportionately affect people with low incomes and communities of color—affordability and health—and examined developer and architect perspectives on community engagement.

As with all improvements to affordable housing, the first question was, “How much does it cost?” Joanna Frank, Executive Director, Center for Active Design, pointed to the *Active Design Supplement: Affordable Designs for Affordable Housing*, which presents low- and no-cost changes to affordable housing to support public health outcomes. As of 2005, chronic diseases were responsible for 75% of deaths and infectious diseases only 9%. According to Frank, “Physical inactivity has replaced smoking as the leading cause of preventable death in the world. Chronic diseases account for more than 83% of the \$1.4 trillion the US spends on health care annually.”

Thankfully, statistics on the benefits of Active Design are encouraging. Frank noted that, “just two minutes—about six floors—of stair climbing a day burns enough calories to prevent average annual

weight gain for an American adult. Creating a more enticing and walkable public realm can result in a 161% increase in physical activity.” The Center for Active Design’s *Building Healthy Places Toolkit* provides 21 evidence-based recommendations. The organization’s collaboration with First Lady Michelle Obama’s Partnership for a Healthier America and developers, including Vitus, “helps America’s leading real estate developers prioritize health in the design and development of affordable housing.”

The panel included presentations by Kimberly Murphy, AIA, Associate, Edelman Sultan Knox Wood Architects, on New York’s New Settlement, and William Quinn Sabatini, AIA, ACHA, Founding Principal, Dekker/Perich/Sabatini, on Casita de Colores, completed in 2014 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The projects address Active Design on the small and large scale with features like active street edges and indoor and outdoor spaces for exercise. Maryanne Speroni, Assistant Director and Fund Manager, Vitus, said, “As an owner of affordable properties, we have a unique opportunity to reach people in need.” She said Vitus sees housing as a “platform” to impact issues of public health and equity.

Panelists recommended tailoring designs to the specific population who will use the building through real community engagement. While the discussion emphasized design, it also touched on policy implications. Architects and advocates lauded Active Design, but acknowledged that costs can prohibit implementation. With government funding uncertain, panelists called for “impact investors” and creative financing.



Dekker/Perich/Sabatini's Casita de Colores in Albuquerque incorporates active design
Credit: Patrick Coulie



DeWitt Clinton High School garden, Bronx, NY
Credit: Raymond Pultinas

Activity has been designed out of our lives.

— Rebecca Lee, MPH, Physical Activity & Nutrition Coordinator, East & Central Harlem District Public Health Office, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Breakout Session: “Urban Schoolyards: The Next Great Public Space”

Many see schools as “the next frontier” for Active Design. In “Urban Schoolyards: The Next Great Public Space,” Lois Brink, MLA, Chief Strategist, The Big SandBox, noted that in the average American city, schools occupy the second largest amount of land. She argued that urban schoolyards offer the chance to create “multi-generational spaces for both students and the community” and “green ‘breathing spaces’ to augment deficient park systems.”

In New York City, connected programs of the NYC Department of Education and NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, along with the Trust for Public Land, are turning schoolyards into playgrounds. The work is supported by the City’s *Active Design Toolkit for Schools*, DOE’s Wellness Grants and Garden to Café program, and the NYC Excellence in School Wellness Award. OneNYC, the City’s “plan for a strong and just city,” seeks to improve food access in schools, support school gardens, and encourage students’ active play to combat national trends of increasing childhood obesity and declining physical activity. “Activity has been designed out of our lives,”

said moderator Rebecca Lee, MPH, East & Central Harlem District Public Health Office, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Lee described school-based strategies as the “great equalizer,” reaching all children.

Raymond Pultinas, Sustainability Coordinator, DeWitt Clinton High School, shared his work in the Bronx. Pultinas partnered with two dozen groups from the school, neighborhood, and city to lead the creation and maintenance of the school’s garden. He spoke of the garden’s transformational qualities, noting “Conversations in the garden tend to be quiet. When we explore the space of the garden our senses are awakened.” The high school is expanding its greening efforts by creating the James Baldwin Memorial Outdoor Learning Center, to be sited adjacent to the garden.

Linda Pollak, AIA, ASLA Affiliate, Partner, Marpillero Pollak Architects, is designing the outdoor learning center. Her firm uses scientific research on Active Design to inform its work. For instance, the firm’s designs incorporate “loose parts”—objects in the environment that students can move and manipulate—that Pollak said “have been found to contribute to diverse and creative play.” Pollak, described how seemingly

More important than body max index (BMI) shift is whether kids love going to school.

— Dr. Terry Huang, PhD, MPH, CPH
Professor of Public Health at the City
University of New York and University
of Nebraska Medical Center

banal elements, like fences, can accommodate gathering spaces, storage, and community art. Pollak pointed to the “triple bottom line” of sustainability: urban agriculture, clean air and water, and human connectedness. According to Sharon Jaye, SFP, Director of Sustainability, NYC Department of Education, investments in physical transformations can lead to government savings. Jaye cited Philadelphia, which sees \$5,000 a year in storm water savings for every acre of asphalt turned to green space. This work is not only about creating greener, more active schools, as Jaye described, but, in the long-term, engaging the next generation to care about climate change.

The panelists agreed that school gardens can encourage students’ greater sense of ownership and engagement with their school, leading to a greater sense of community. To achieve these kinds of transformations on a larger scale, they pointed to the need for supplemental funding from public and private sources.

Breakout Session: “Using Design to Promote Healthy Eating in Public Schools”

A second schools workshop, “Using Design to Promote Healthy Eating in Public Schools,” focused on behavioral outcomes, asking how design can help empower schoolchildren to make

healthy choices. Moderated by Lisa Herron, Community Engagement Coordinator, Department of Population Health Science and Policy, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, the panel discussion examined health outcomes that design can support, such as increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, along with community engagement strategies.

Panelists argued that school buildings themselves can be sites for learning. Dina Sorensen, Assoc. AIA, LEED AP BD+C, Project Designer, VMDO Architects, showed how daylighting in classrooms and communal spaces, along with strategically placed, well-designed signage around stair use, water, and food, have been shown to impact children’s behavior around health.

New York City and the Center for Active Design are distributing the *Active Design Toolkit for Schools* to stakeholders—including administrators, students, and parents—and offering trainings. The goals of the toolkit and trainings are to mobilize school communities around Active Design and to give assistance for school and student-generated projects.

George Edwards, Coordinator, School Food, NYC Department of Education, described the Garden to Café Program, which is a collaboration of the SchoolFund and GrowNYC. Garden to Café

programs, such as harvest events, connect school and community gardens with school lunch meals. Edwards reported that the 80 schools participating in the program have predominately African-American and Hispanic students.

Dr. Terry Huang, PhD, MPH, CPH, Professor of Public Health, City University of New York and University of Nebraska Medical Center, called school-based work “a piece of the puzzle.” Foregrounding health through school design can create a groundswell for community action, he said. Huang, co-author of *Designer Schools: The Role of School Space and Architecture in*

Obesity Prevention, is developing qualitative evidence on the role of design in schoolchildren’s health. His work uses children’s drawings and guided tours to gain insight into children’s experiences. With Sorenson, Huang described work at Buckingham Elementary School in Virginia that links health research with design strategies. Within a year of Active Design interventions at Buckingham Elementary, the school saw greater attendance, he said. Huang ended by bringing the conversation back to the larger picture: “More important than body mass index (BMI) shift is whether kids love going to school.”

Buckingham Elementary student drawing: dining commons at 12 months post-occupancy
Credit: Dr. Terry Huang, PhD, MPH, CPH, Professor of Public Health, City University of New York and University of Nebraska Medical Center





Parsons Design Workshop,
Highbridge Recreation
Center Public Facilities,
New York, NY
Credit: Michael Moran

When citizens engage with government and weigh in on design, government builds better parks, and the public continues to care for places that they have helped make.

— Le’Alani S. Boykin,
Technical Assistance Manager for
Community Visioning and Planning,
Partnerships for Parks

Breakout Session: “Bridging Sectors to Create Recreational Opportunities”

Susan Chin, FAIA, Executive Director, Design Trust for Public Space, moderated a discussion on collaborations between government, academic, and community partners that have increased the amount and quality of recreational facilities in New York City.

Charles McKinney, Assoc. AIA, ASLA, Principal Urban Designer, NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, and his collaborator, Alfred Zollinger, Associate Professor of Architecture and Interior Design, Parsons The New School for Design, described a three-year project to improve the functionality of the Highbridge Recreation Center in Northern Manhattan. Parsons students were involved in the full design-build process. They developed the building master plan, crafted the design with community and park staff, obtained the Community Board and City approvals, and constructed the project. The full renovation included a dance studio, computer lab, and new exercise equipment furnished by the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation. Since the renovation, the recreation center’s membership has tripled.

Hester Street Collaborative and NYC Parks Foundation’s Partnership for Parks created *People Make Parks*, a “how-to guide for participating in park design.” Le’Alani S. Boykin,

Technical Assistance Manager for Community Visioning and Planning, Partnerships for Parks, noted, “When citizens engage with government and weigh in on design, government builds better parks, and the public continues to care for places that they have helped make.” The process has attracted more funding for parks and improved long-term stewardship. A community-based online tool allows people to submit suggestions for projects they would like to see.

Anandi A. Premall, Sustainable Communities Consultant, SustyQ (Sustainable Queens), shared her work to promote wellness by increasing access to community amenities, such as healthy food and safe parks, in underserved neighborhoods. For example, Queens residents, with Friends of The QueensWay, advocate for the transformation of an abandoned 3.5-mile railway, which stretches from Rego Park to Ozone Park, into a cultural community greenway.

Historically, local New York City groups have been intimidated by the slow pace of large-scale projects. Panelists highlighted precedents and toolkits that community organizations can use to help achieve their goals. They recommended investigating potential synergies between government and nonprofit organizations to help with the preparation and condition-building needed to tackle the complex processes of project design and capital funding.

Breakout Session: “Activating Open Space at a Mott Haven NYCHA Development: Gardens and Green Spaces.”

Outside of New York’s parks, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments maintain considerable open space. With low lot-coverage ratios, NYCHA campuses typically have large spaces covered with grass or surface parking. These spaces are sometimes underutilized, which creates new opportunities for physical activity and community engagement.

Two workshops at FitCity, led by Ennead Architects’ Ennead Lab, focused on activating open space at a Mott Haven NYCHA development.

A morning session on gardening and an afternoon workshop on active recreation raised questions on resident involvement in open space programming. NYCHA residents are predominately low-income people of color and their campuses and neighborhoods are often sites of acute equity issues, including insufficient access to healthy food and opportunities for physical activity.

Potential Pilot Project

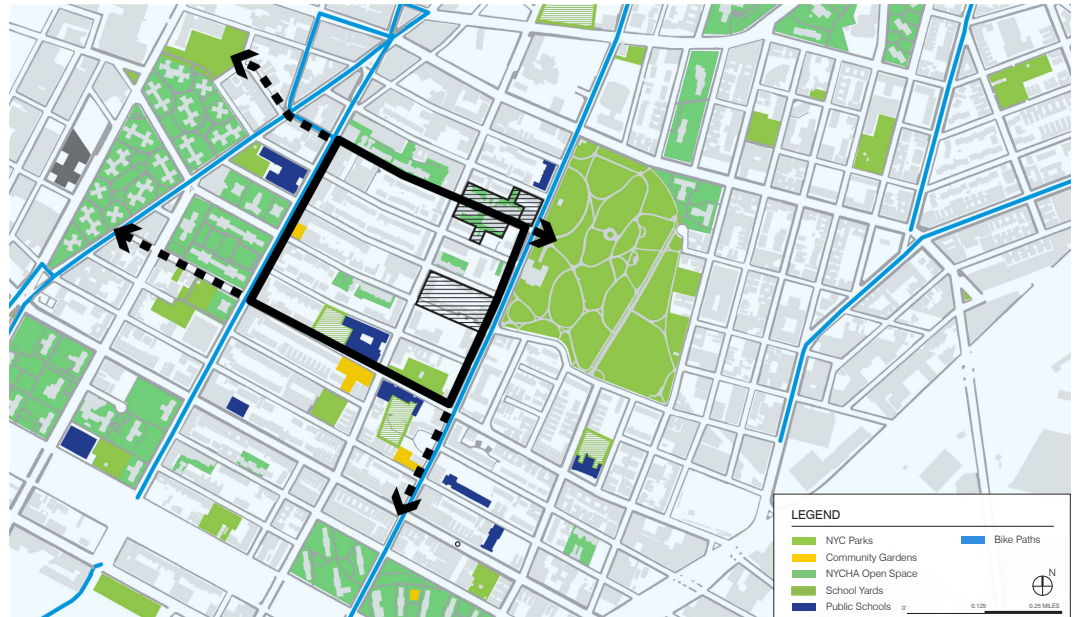
“Mott Haven Mile” (page 26)

Credit: Ennead Lab, Mathews Nielsen
Landscape Architects, and Peterson
Rich Office with Sagi Golan

FitCity 10 participants take

part in a visioning session (page 27)

Credit: Elizabeth Hamby







The FitCity 10 “FitNYCHA” workshops led Ennead Labs to pursue potential pilot projects in collaboration with NYCHA’s “Next Generation” team. These projects will improve quality of life for residents by fostering clean, safe, active, and connected communities.

The workshops jumpstarted Active Design-based projects designed to help address these concerns.

Convened by then-NYCHA Deputy Director of Special Projects, Lindsay Haddix, the NYCHA workshops identified existing conditions at Betances I and IV, NYCHA developments in the South Bronx’s Mott Haven neighborhood. The campuses were built in the early 1970s and, according to Haddix, were found to have “underused and under-programmed open space, a lack of activity at the ground level, poor site visibility, and a lack of ownership and stewardship with regards to open space.”

A variety of possible open space improvement strategies emerged from the workshops. While small-scale interventions showed promise, the workshop organizers felt “it became clear that the myriad issues facing these two sites—and NYCHA properties in general—could only be addressed if a broader approach were taken as well.” One idea that came from the workshop was “The Mott Haven Mile,” described by Ennead as “a neighborhood-scale series of site and street improvements that would link together the Betances complexes and stitch them to nearby resources,” as St. Mary’s Park, local schools, and public transit. Any work would tie in with existing initiatives, as Betances IV is part of the 2014 Choice Neighborhood Initiatives Mott Haven Transformation Plan.

Mathews Nielsen Landscape Architects, Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, and the Mount Sinai School of Medicine collaborated on the workshops. The sessions

opened with Betances Houses site analysis and schematic design presentations by architects and urban designers Miriam Peterson and Nathan Rich, of Peterson Rich Office, with Sagi Golan, who first collaborated on NYCHA design issues under a fellowship with the Institute for Public Architecture. The presentation set up a short workshop, where small groups of FitCity attendees generated ideas to support the linked goals of increased physical activity, safety, and social equity. The workshop connected NYCHA’s “Next Generation” work around “safe, clean, and connected communities” with Active Design principles.

FitCity 10, Beyond the Workshops

Community engagement went beyond the workshops. During the FitCity Lunch Break, attendees gained free admission to the neighboring Museum of the City of New York, where a recent renovation by Ennead Architects with Pentagram turned an internal stairwell into inviting “Active Design” stairs. Attendees took “active selfies” against the entry lobby backdrop and posted them to social media.

Not content to simply *discuss* ways to incorporate physical activity into everyday life, conference organizers also included a “FitCity Moves” physical activity break. Monica Ortiz Rossi, MFA, Active Design Coordinator, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, led the main auditorium at the New York Academy of Medicine in a five-minute workout set to Stevie Wonder’s “Living for the City.”

WHAT'S NEXT: REIMAGINING FITCITY

After celebrating a decade of FitCity, conference leaders are now working to further cultivate the Active Design movement by examining the frequency of convening agencies and practitioners across disciplines to catalyze a community of practice.

Evolving in response to participants' interests and needs—and growing demand—FitCity seeks to be a platform for sharing best practices and the latest public health research. As FitCity evolves, so does the way we learn and connect.

Conference leaders are exploring new content delivery and workshop formats, including labs and hackathons, to inform emerging practice. FitCity seeks to refine and improve upon strategies to share learnings and embed Active Design in a wide range of disciplines that shape our built environment.

As we continue to champion the role of Active Design in building strong, sustainable communities, we look forward to what the next 10 years of FitCity will bring!

Rethinking
the delivery of the
conference will help
facilitate collaboration
in support of
transforming our city.

— Linda Pollak, AIA, ASLA Affiliate,
Partner, Marpillero Pollak Architects

FITCITY 10 AGENDA

May 11, 2015
New York Academy of Medicine
1216 5th Ave, New York

9:00-9:15 am

Welcome and
Introductions

David S. Siscovick, MD, MPH,

Senior Vice President for
Research, New York
Academy of Medicine

Sarah A. Wolf, MPH, RD,

Deputy Director, Bureau of
Chronic Disease Prevention
& Tobacco Control,
NYC Department of Health
and Mental Hygiene

9:15-10:00 am

Health Keynote

Mindy Thompson Fullilove, MD,

Professor of Clinical Studies
of Sociomedical Sciences,
Columbia University Mailman
School of Public Health

Introduction: Sonia Angell, MD,

MPH, Deputy Commissioner,
Prevention and Primary Care,
NYC Department of Health
and Mental Hygiene

10:00-10:05 am

FitCity Moves:
Physical Activity Break

Monica Ortiz Rossi, MFA,

Active Design Coordinator,
Bureau of Chronic Disease
Prevention and Tobacco
Control, NYC Department of
Health and Mental Hygiene

10:05-11:00 am

Commissioners' Panel

Moderator: David Burney, FAIA,

Interim Executive Director,
AIA New York Chapter and
Center for Architecture;
Chair, Center for Active Design

Feniosky A. Peña-Mora, ScD,

Commissioner,
NYC Department of
Design and Construction

Mitchell Silver, FAICP,

Commissioner,
NYC Department of
Parks and Recreation

Victor Calise, Commissioner,

Mayor's Office for
People with Disabilities

Caryn Resnick, Deputy

Commissioner, External
Affairs, NYC Department
for the Aging

Sonia Angell, MD, MPH, Deputy
Commissioner, Prevention and
Primary Care, NYC Department
of Health and Mental Hygiene

Purnima Kapur, Executive
Director, NYC Department
of City Planning

Wendy Feuer, Assistant
Urban Design and Art, NYC
Department of Transportation

Eden Hauslaib, Senior Advisor,
Strategic Initiatives,
NYC Administration for
Children's Services

11:00-11:15 am Transition

11:15-12:45 pm Breakout Sessions

Panel: Designing for Health in Affordable Housing

Moderator: Yianice Hernandez,
Director of Active Living,
Bureau of Chronic Disease
Prevention and Tobacco
Control, NYC Department of
Health and Mental Hygiene

Joanna Frank, Executive Director,
Center for Active Design

Kimberly Murphy, AIA,
Associate, Edelman Sultan
Knox Wood / Architects

William Quinn Sabatini, AIA,
ACHA, Founding Principal,
Dekker/Perich/Sabatini

Maryanne Speroni,
Assistant Director and
Fund Manager, Vitus

Panel: Urban Schoolyards: The Next Great Public Space

Moderator: Rebecca Lee, MPH,
Physical Activity & Nutrition
Coordinator, East & Central
Harlem District Public Office,
NYC Department of Health
and Mental Hygiene

Lois Brink, MLA, Chief Strategist,
The Big SandBox

Sharon Jaye, D.Ed, SFP,
Director of Sustainability,
NYC Department of Education

Linda Pollak, AIA, ASLA Affiliate,
Partner, Marpillero Pollak
Architects

Raymond Pultinas,
Sustainability Coordinator,
DeWitt Clinton High School

Workshop: Activating Open Space at a Mott Haven NYCHA Development: Gardens and Green Spaces

Convener: Lindsay Haddix,
Deputy Director of Special
Projects, Capital Projects
Division, New York City
Housing Authority

Facilitators: Andrew Burdick,
AIA, Associate Partner,
Ennead Architects

Ilana Cohen, Landscape Designer,
Mathews Nielsen
Landscape Architects

Dr. Elizabeth Garland, Associate
Professor of Preventive
Medicine and Pediatrics,
Icahn School of Medicine
at Mount Sinai

Sagi Golan, Associate Urban
Designer, NYC Department
of City Planning

Gina Lovasi, Assistant Professor
in Epidemiology, Columbia
University Mailman School
of Public Health

Andrea Mata, Senior Manager
for Community Health
Initiatives, Office of Public
Private Partnerships, NYCHA

Signe Nielsen, FASLA,
Principal, Mathews Nielsen
Landscape Architects

Miriam Peterson, Partner,
Peterson Rich Office

Jacob Reidel, Designer,
Ennead Architects

Nathan Rich, Partner,
Peterson Rich Office

David Pepper, AIA, Associate
Partner, Ennead Architects

Mao Xiaoyun, Urban Designer,
Ennead Architects

FITCITY 10 AGENDA

May 11, 2015
New York Academy of Medicine
1216 5th Ave, New York

Workshop: What's
Next in Active Design:
East Harlem and
Expanding the Vision of
Healthy Neighborhoods
in NYC

Moderators: Lee Altman,
LEED AP, Active Design
Coordinator, NYC Department
of Design and Construction;
Claudia Herasme, Deputy Director,
Office of Chief Urban
Designer, NYC Department
of City Planning
Carmen Diaz-Malvido, Program
Manager, East & Central Harlem
District Public Health Office,
NYC Department of Health
and Mental Hygiene
Juan Martinez, Director of
Strategic Initiatives, NYC
Department of Transportation
Suzanne Nienaber, AICP,
Partnerships Director,
Center for Active Design
Karen Taylor, Assistant
Commissioner, Bureau of
Community Services, NYC
Department for the Aging

12:45-2:15 pm

Lunch

2:15-3:45 pm

Breakout Sessions

Panel: Bridging Sectors
to Create Recreational
Opportunities

Moderator: Susan Chin, FAIA,
Executive Director,
Design Trust for Public Space
Le'alani S. Boykin,
Technical Assistance Manager
for Community Visioning
and Planning, Partnerships
for Parks
Charles McKinney, Assoc. AIA,
ASLA, Principal Urban Designer,
NYC Department of Parks
and Recreation
Alfred Zollinger, Associate
Professor of Architecture
and Interior Design, Parsons
The New School for Design
Anandi A. Premllal, Sustainable
Communities Consultant,
SustyQ (Sustainable Queens)

Panel: Community
Engagement and Active
Transportation:
Working to Achieve
Collective Impact

Moderator: Tracey Capers,
Executive Vice President,
Programs/Organizational
Development, Bedford
Stuyvesant Restoration
Corporation
**Mayor Miguelanxo Fernández
Lores, MD,** City of Pontevedra,
Galice, Spain
Henry Greenidge, Director
of Special Projects, NYC
Department of Transportation
Maggie Veatch, MPH,
Director of Physical Activity
and Nutrition, Brooklyn District
Public Health Office, NYC
Department of Health and
Mental Hygiene

Panel: Using Design
to Promote Healthy
Eating in Schools

Moderator: Lisa Herron,
Community Engagement
Coordinator, Icahn School of
Medicine at Mount Sinai,
Department of Population
Health Science and Policy
George Edwards, Coordinator,
Garden to Café, School Food,
NYC Department of Education
Terry Huang, PhD, MPH, CPH
Professor, City University
of New York and University of
Nebraska Medical Center
**Dina Sorensen, Assoc. AIA, LEED
AP BD+C,** Project Designer,
VMDO Architects

Workshop: Activating
Open Space at a
Mott Haven NYCHA
Development:
Active Recreation

**For a list of facilitators, please
see the Mott Haven morning
workshop**

Workshop: Using an
Innovative Visioning
Method to Activate
Change: Learning from
Staten Island

Moderator: Elizabeth Hamby,

Community Urban Planner,
Center for Health Equity,
NYC Department of Health
and Mental Hygiene

Ginny Mantello, MD, Director,

Health & Wellness,
Staten Island Borough
President's Office

Michael Schnall, Chief of Staff,
Staten Island, NYC Department
of Parks & Recreation

Jody Stoll, Project Manager,
Partnerships to Improve
Community Health Grant,
Staten Island Partnership
for Community Wellness

Emily Walker, Director of
Outreach & Programs,
New Yorkers for Parks

3:45-4:00 pm

Transition

4:00-4:45 pm

Design Keynote

Daniel Hernandez,

Deputy Commissioner for
Neighborhood Strategies,
NYC Department of Housing
Preservation and Development

Introduction: Eric Boorstyn, AIA,

Associate Commissioner,
Architecture & Engineering/
Technical Services,
NYC Department of Design
and Construction

4:45-5:00 pm

Closing

David Burney, FAIA, Interim

Executive Director,
AIA New York Chapter and
Center for Architecture;
Chair, Center for Active Design

6:00-8:00 pm

Center for Active
Design Awards and
Cocktail Reception

4 Columbus Circle

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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the dozens of volunteers who
made the conference possible.*

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