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DESIGN TRUST FOR PUBLIC SPACE
AND NYC DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT
ISSUE

THE FIRST COMPREHENSIVE DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR
RETAIL AND OTHER GROUND-FLOOR USES IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

Guidelines offer feasible ways to improve economic vitality and streetscape in underserved neighborhoods.

NEW YORK, NY (Tuesday, January 26, 2015) – The Design Trust for Public Space and the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) today released Laying the Groundwork: Design Guidelines for Retail & Other Ground-Floor Uses in Affordable Housing Developments, a robust set of guidelines for designing efficient, flexible ground-floor space for retail and other community services in affordable housing developments. These important and independently-derived guidelines align closely with New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio’s Housing New York: A Five Borough, Ten-Year Housing Plan to create or preserve 200,000 apartments and homes units over the course of a decade.

“Good retail space on the ground floor of affordable housing developments plays a critical role in supporting the City’s goal to foster diverse and livable neighborhoods – a key tenet of Mayor’s Bill de Blasio’s Housing New York plan. By collaborating with the Design Trust for Public Space on Laying the Groundwork, we have strengthened the expertise needed to design retail and community facility spaces that better serve our neighborhoods. These guidelines will be used by HPD, other city agencies, community organizations, and developers who work closely with us as we build a more vibrant city,” said NYC HPD Commissioner Vicki Been.

“Affordable mixed-use developments have an important role to play in stabilizing and strengthening communities. When designed well, they provide high quality residential units and flexible ground-floor space for a diverse range of retail and community tenants that will serve both the developments as well as the surrounding neighborhoods,” said Design Trust for Public Space executive director Susan Chin.

In 2014, the Design Trust issued a request for proposals as part of "The Energetic City" initiative. Out of nearly 90 submissions, the Trust selected HPD’s proposal to develop design guidelines for retail and other ground-floor uses in affordable housing projects. Today’s guidelines are the result. The Design Trust-led project builds on a challenge faced by the City: ground-floor space that is designed only with housing in mind may result in underutilized or vacant storefronts and blight the very neighborhoods these affordable developments are meant to serve. The design guidelines invite developers and architects to think creatively about the ways buildings contribute to the life and health of neighborhoods, encouraging attractive, active, and resilient streetscapes.

Laying the Groundwork provides practical recommendations for building ground-floor space that is functional for retailers, community, and cultural organizations; accessible and convenient for residents and neighbors; and cost-effective for developers. The 87-page, user-friendly publication features checklists, illustrations, and inspirational real-life examples.

The guidelines, informed by Mayor Bill de Blasio’s holistic approach to community development in support of diverse, livable neighborhoods, are applicable to a wide range of retail models — such as grocers, pharmacies, and banks; community services such as health clinics, senior centers, and childcare; and cultural and recreational centers — that can meet and evolve with community needs.
Laying the Groundwork guidelines will be incorporated into HPD’s requests for proposals (RFPs), the evaluation of development proposals, and the review of architectural plans to ensure that retail space in new affordable housing developments will be a community asset for both residents and neighbors.

The design guidelines address a wide variety of topics identified by the project team as critical for achieving successful ground-floor space. Examples include:

- Facade and signage: Transparent facades with distinct signage that clearly differentiates retail from residential spaces attract more customers. Exterior lighting promotes safety and reduces crime.
- Exterior access and streetscape: Amenities such as benches and bike racks support the public and a wide range of retail tenants, including small-scale, local merchants.
- Interior architecture: Spatial flexibility with adequate height clearances, and organized, convenient column grid spacing to create desirable retail space that can accommodate a variety of tenants and provide accessible amenities to neighborhoods.
- MEP: Mechanical (heating, cooling, and ventilation), electrical, plumbing; and fire protection systems: Sufficient, individually metered utilities promote energy efficiency, simplify lease negotiation, and reduce the price of fit-out.

HPD has found that the cost to developers of implementing many aspects of the guidelines will be negligible, especially when longer-term benefits are considered.

“Flexible, attractive retail spaces require attention to detail and some up-front investment on the part of developers. However, the investment in infrastructure support to retail spaces minimizes disruption during fit-out and is largely paid back through reductions in tenant installation costs, as demonstrated in the project team’s study,” said Design Trust Engineering Fellow Fiona Cousins.

“This retail design manual will be an invaluable asset when working to build the capacity of community-based organizations and BIDs. Physical design plays an integral role in determining the potential success of commercial districts. High quality design for retail spaces is especially important in underserved neighborhoods in New York City where design is necessary to help compensate for real and perceived locational disadvantages,” said NYC Department of Small Business Services Deputy Commissioner for Neighborhood Development Michael Blaise Backer.

“The Laying the Groundwork guidelines will help us in creating spaces that are flexible enough to accommodate both community service facilities and retail tenants. We want a diverse range of uses in our developments to serve the diverse population of youth, seniors, and families in Bushwick, Ridgewood, and surrounding neighborhoods,” said Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens Council (RBSCC) Assistant Executive Director of Business Development and Real Estate Scott Short.

“Successful retail can have a powerful effect in improving the quality and diversity of amenities for local residents, activating streetscapes, and supporting the local economy. The Laying the Groundwork guidelines will be a useful resource in helping to ensure that new developments have the potential to accommodate a broad range of retailers”, said Larisa Ortiz Associates Principal and International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) Eastern Division P3 Retail Co-Chair Larisa Ortiz.

For further information on Laying the Groundwork: Design Guidelines for Retail & Other Ground-Floor Uses in Affordable Housing Developments please visit http://designtrust.org/publications/laying-groundwork/. For a press copy, please contact Ozgur Gungor at ogungor@designtrust.org.
**Laying the Groundwork Fellows**
A team of Fellows, each an expert in her/his own field, led the research, design, and planning work for *Laying the Groundwork*. They are: Fiona Cousins, Engineering Fellow; Penny Hardy, Graphic Design Fellow; and Hayes & James Slade, Architecture Fellows. [http://designtrust.org/projects/groundwork/team/](http://designtrust.org/projects/groundwork/team/)

**New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)**
HPD is the nation’s largest municipal housing preservation and development agency. Its mission is to promote quality housing and diverse, thriving neighborhoods for New Yorkers through loan and development programs for new affordable housing, preservation of the affordability of the existing housing stock, enforcement of housing quality standards, and educational programs for tenants and building owners. HPD is tasked with fulfilling Mayor de Blasio’s Housing New York: A Five-Borough Ten-Year Plan to create and preserve 200,000 affordable units for New Yorkers at the very lowest incomes to those in the middle class. For more information visit [www.nyc.gov/hpd](http://www.nyc.gov/hpd) and for regular updates on HPD news and services, connect with us via [www.facebook.com/nychpd](http://www.facebook.com/nychpd) and [www.twitter.com/nychousing](http://www.twitter.com/nychousing).

**Design Trust for Public Space**
The Design Trust for Public Space is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the future of public space in New York City. Our projects bring together city agencies, community groups and private sector experts to make a lasting impact—through design—on how New Yorkers live, work and play. Design Trust’s projects jumpstarted the [High Line’s conversions](http://designtrust.org/) from derelict railway to a green corridor of open space, activated innovation for the first custom-built [Taxi of Tomorrow](http://designtrust.org/), and developed the [sustainability guidelines](http://designtrust.org/) that became the precursor to New York City’s Local Law and PlaNYC. [http://designtrust.org/](http://designtrust.org/)

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