

Ground Up

June 29, 2018

In New York City, public life happens on the street. As everyday usage shifts and changes, these streets are transformed by heightened demand for public space. How can landscape architects meet these new needs?

Today, New York urban culture values driving less and the city is less reliant on cars. The street system is adapting to a growing demand for walkable public space, and contemporary policy is compelling the city to adapt to the demands for open space by requiring private developers take on and fund public realm improvements.

This in turn is giving Landscape Architects the opportunity to form these public spaces and to redefine the image and experience of the city. HMWhite is among the Landscape Architecture firms that have been fortunate to participate in shaping the city.

HMWhite work is rooted in a ground up approach treating every functional infrastructure project as a catalyst that performs the vital function of public open space, laying a foundation for social and communal interaction and humanizing the otherwise dense and gritty transit oriented or interstitial space.



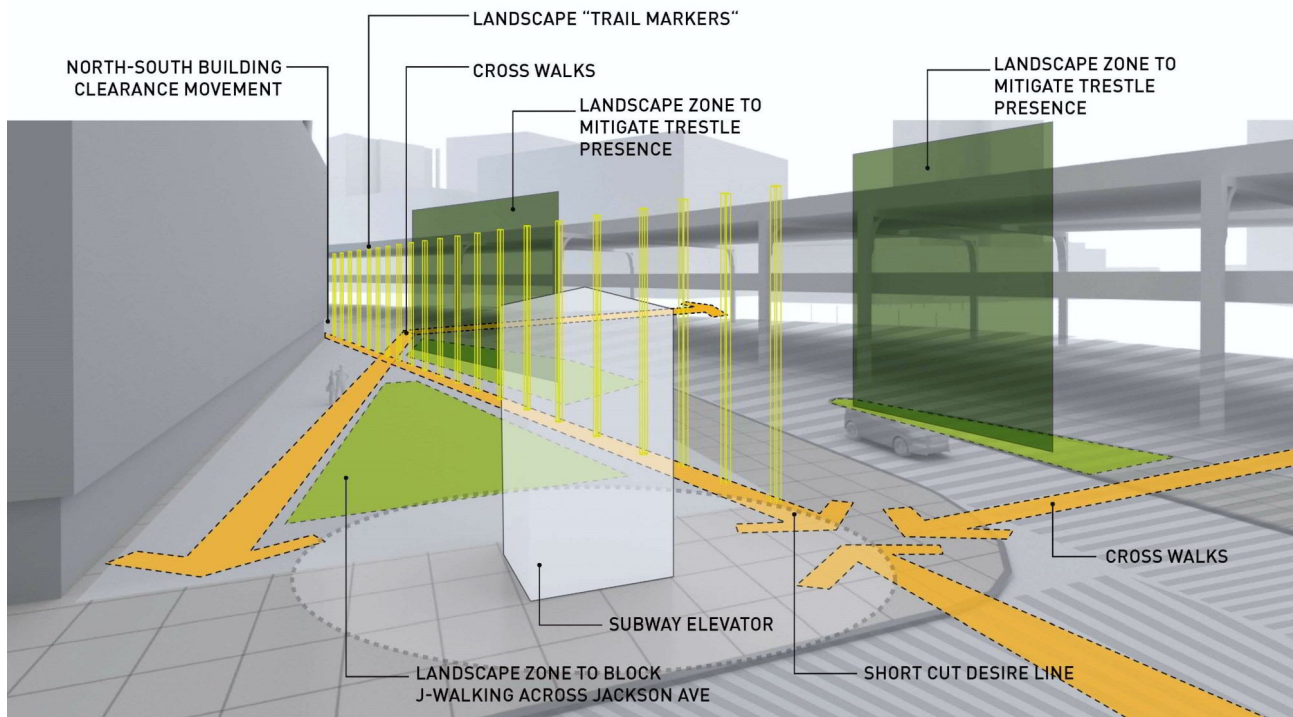
An HMWhite project that exemplifies this approach is the Gotham Streetscape near the Jackson Park development. In response to the city's requirement for widened sidewalks, the Gotham Streetscape sustains a critical mass of street trees using Silva-Cell technology, masking the abutting LIRR corridor trestles and humanizing the large scale cacophonous transit-oriented junction. The porous surfaces and softscape areas mitigate storm water runoff and reduce heat island effect. The canopies provide habitat and attenuate the sounds of the LIRR tracks. Shade and seating elements make this left over transit intersection a node for respite as well as social interaction.

Across the street from the Gotham Streetscape and nestled within a complex of 1,700 apartments is Jackson Park. Designed as a social heart where diverse social experiences

emerge within a dramatic topographic massing and legible planting matrices, the Jackson Park commons is a dynamic central oval, ringed by quiet and intimate spaces defined by aspen copses along its periphery.

Jackson Park and the Gotham Streetscape are just across the street from each other and are unified by a common design language and common objectives: softening their transit-oriented context, bringing in ecology and respite, mitigating storm water runoff and reducing urban heat island effect.

SPATIAL OPPORTUNITIES & CONSTRAINTS



It is thrilling to be a leader in facilitating the influence of policy on urban design and to see how other landscape architects and designers are innovating in response to these policies. Across the city, policies and public realm requirements are eliciting novel forms of public space. In Greenpoint, a waterfront setback policy is catalyzing the formation of parks that provide access to the water. City-wide requirements for widening sidewalks will continue to humanize the otherwise monumental and fast paced streets and avenues.

The effects of these policies are visible in a very big way in projects such as Brooklyn Bridge Park and in smaller but still significant sidewalk improvements such as sidewalk cafes popping up around the city. The outcome of these citywide ordinances for better public space are fascinating case-studies on emerging landscape urbanism strategies.