



# A Tree Would Be Nice

Proposals for Urban Greenspace -  
and a More Livable City

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▲  
**View of the city through  
the trees at Central Park  
in New York City, 2018.**  
(Courtesy of Contributor)

Throughout history, the integration of greenspace into the urban fabric has been a crucial aspect of city planning and public health. The presence of parks within a city has been proven to have a positive impact on the environment by improving air quality, providing shade, and reducing water pollution. A number of studies have similarly proven a correlation between access to greenspace and reduction of an individual's risk of developing depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, as well as lower cortisol levels in the body.

### **HISTORY AND CURRENT TRENDS**

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has led to a surge in stress levels and economic uncertainty, emphasizing the need for more of these spaces and their proven benefits. The pandemic has also, however, highlighted a number of new issues with the greenspace that currently exists. Public parks are overcrowding and not all individuals have access to roof decks or balconies. Moving into a future shaped by COVID-19 and whatever its lasting effects may be, the purpose and value of urban greenspace is of renewed and critical importance.

Today, there is very little undeveloped land within most of our urban centers to make the new green spaces we need. We aim to

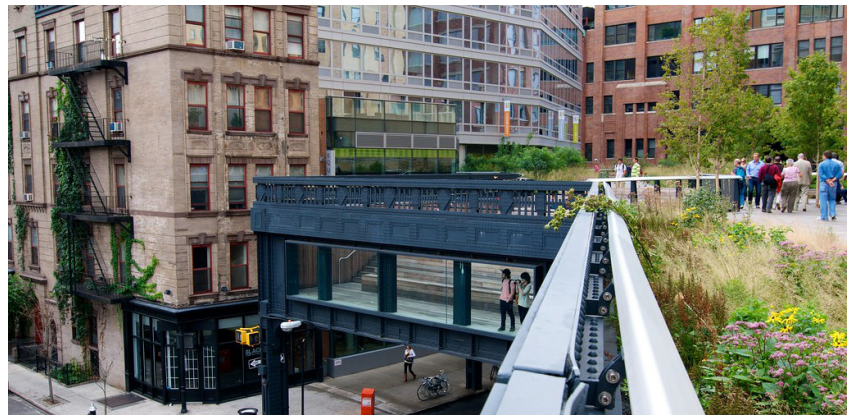


**It is clear that urban greenspace will evolve in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.”**

**The High Line in New York, completed in 2014, built on an existing elevated railroad structure.**  
(Courtesy of Nick Harris, Flickr) ▶

both find underutilized space and to redefine what greenspace is in our cities in the tradition of several recent movements:

- Tactical Urbanism, which prioritizes the phased, the local, the low risk, the DIY, the pop-up, and the short-term over expensive, remote multi-year and grandiose construction projects – and if it works, figuring out how to perpetuate its success.
- The New York Restoration Project, a transformative project to fill New York City with new trees and landscaped parks wherever they can be placed.
- Streets for People, which is based on the models of recent transformations in Barcelona and Utrecht, where streets have been radically transformed to prioritize residents over traffic.
- Edible Schoolyard NYC, which partners with city public schools to transform students’ relationships with food through educational programs by creating school gardens.



Could a modified park bench with modular seating and an inherent connection to nature be the answer? Or perhaps it is found in rethinking the structures that already exist. Whatever it may be, it is clear that urban greenspace will evolve in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have taken a closer look at how to convert a city parking space into a greenspace that can be temporary or permanent depending on its use.

## CONTRIBUTORS



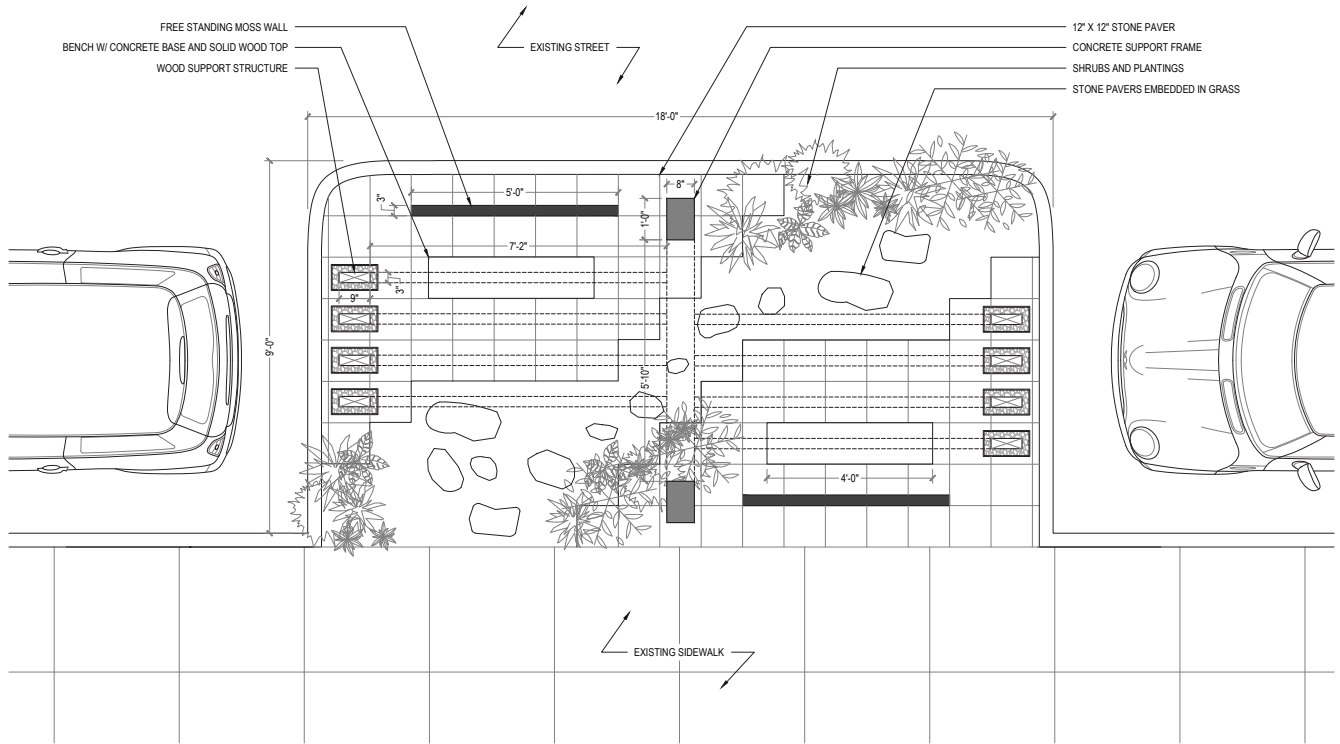
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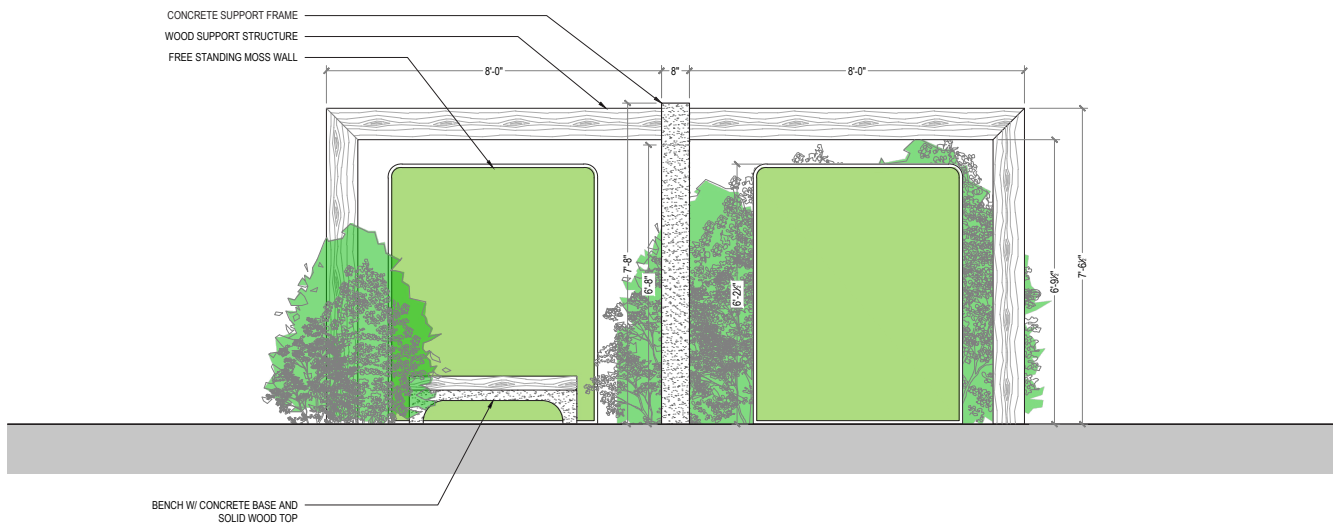
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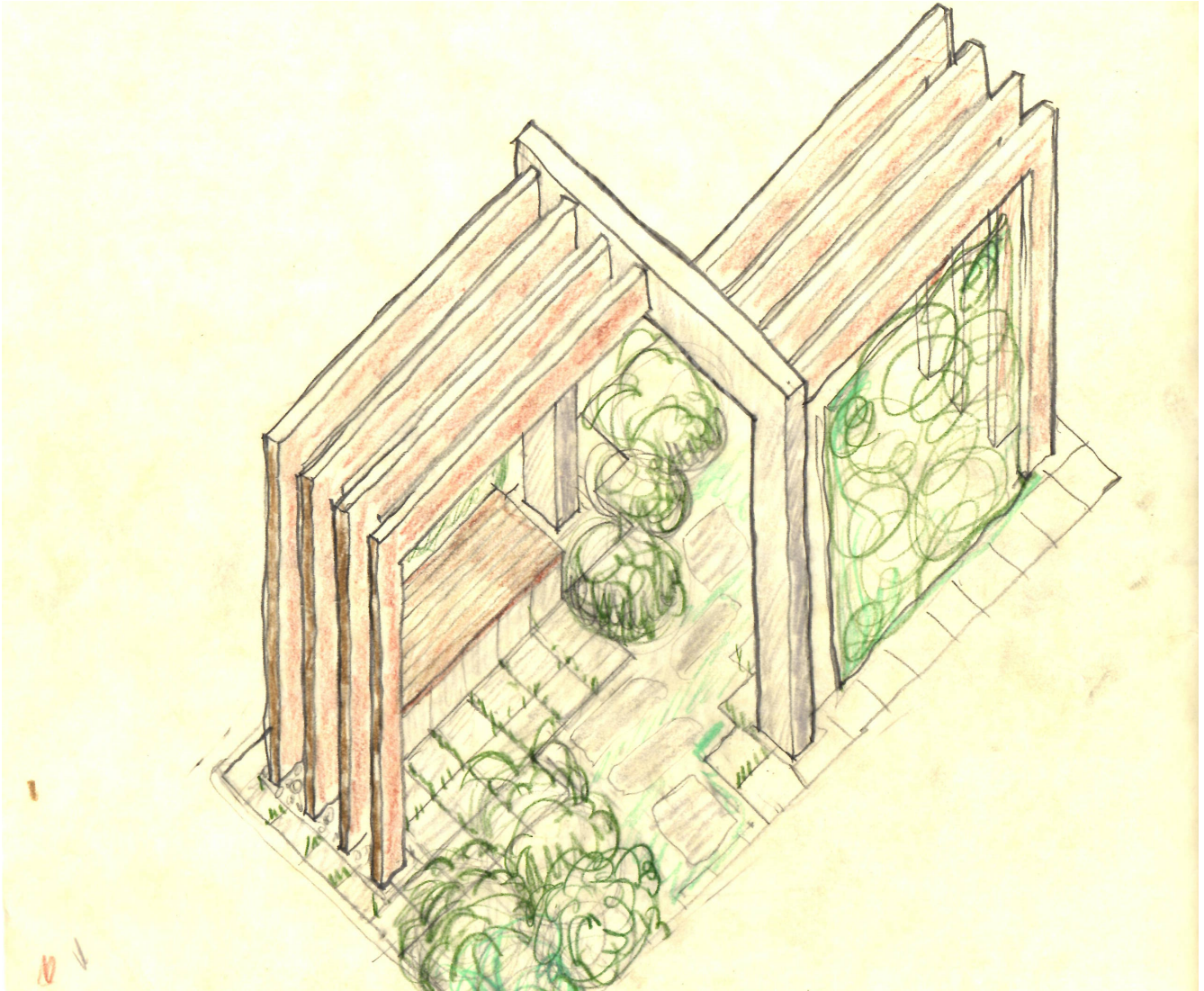
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**Rendering of proposed  
Urban Greenspace design.**



Plan view of proposed design.



Front elevation of proposed design.



Early sketch of proposed design.

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**Katz Architecture works as a partner to building managers, design professionals, and city agencies to ensure the ongoing integrity of our built environment.”**

**NEXT STEPS**

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## About This Series

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**Throughout history, the built environment has transformed in response to the psychological and physical reactions to disease. Likewise, there is a long tradition in architecture of retrofitting buildings for health and hygiene.**

In New York City in 1832, a cholera outbreak attributed to the lack of clean water, killed 5,000 people over the course of three months. In response, five years later, work began on the Croton Aqueduct and a complex system to supply enough water for indoor plumbing - an unheard of luxury before that time.

America's first tuberculosis sanatorium opened in 1885 at Saranac Lake, in Upstate New York where patients were encouraged to sit in wide, glass-enclosed "cure porches" to take in natural light and fresh air. The idea of a sleeping porch or sunroom thus worked its way into the architectural vocabulary of residential buildings from that point forward.

In the days and weeks ahead, New York will face some very difficult challenges. Spaces that seemed adequate before the pandemic will no longer function properly. The building lobby, the office, the restaurant, the grocery store, the apartment, even our green spaces will all require more permanent measures of separation and cleanliness. All of this will need to be done with great speed and with severely limited budgets.

Katz Architecture focuses on the restoration, renovation, preservation, and maintenance of the physical environment. In that capacity, our services include feasibility studies, design, code and zoning consulting, team formation, filing and construction administration services. We have been in practice since 2002, and remain committed to the health, well being, and future of this city.

We continue to actively research the specific architectural implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential new types of spaces and uses that will result from it. We view this as an extension of the work we have always been doing. As a firm, we remain firmly committed to finding order and creating light-filled, hygienic, and uplifting places for people to live, work, and play - and we continue to be ready for those challenges and opportunities.