

**New York City Council
Finance Committee Executive Budget Hearings
May 15, 2014
Public Testimony: Neighborhood Plaza Partnership**

Good morning, I'm Laura Hansen, Executive Director of Neighborhood Plaza Partnership, a program of the Horticultural Society of New York. We are helping neighborhoods transform reclaimed streets into public plazas, by providing services to the non-profit organizations charged with maintaining and programming these spaces.

I am here to express our support for the Department of Transportation's Plaza Program, and ask that the Council support a robust capital budget for building new plazas across the city. With 66 plazas in the works, the agency is well on its way to a plaza in every community district. These are modest interventions with big impacts. Neighborhood plazas mean more open space, safer streets, economic activity, community events, immigrant integration, civic participation, and workforce development.

New Yorkers love the plazas, so even struggling organizations are willing to invest the time and money to privately manage them. Close to half of the 66 plazas underway are in neighborhoods where resources are scarce, and where the financial burden of management falls on low-capacity non-profits.

Neighborhood Plaza Partnership was created specifically to address the challenges those groups face. We are bringing resources and technical assistance to low-capacity plaza managers, while expanding transitional job opportunities for New Yorkers facing employment barriers – through a subsidized maintenance and horticulture service.

I want to thank the Council for recognizing the benefits of plazas and our efforts in its Response to the Mayor's Preliminary Budget. With public support, we can leverage additional private resources, and we will work with the Council, the DOT, SBS, and other agencies to demonstrate a public-private partnership model that is viable and equitable across a range of communities.