

# *W. 22nd Open Street (7th/8th Ave.) Community Workshop Report*

*December 15, 2022*



Collective for  
Community, Culture  
and Environment

TOM LUNKE  
STUDIO

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# Acknowledgments



## **WORKSHOP SPONSORS**

Melodie Bryant, West 22nd Open Street Founder and Manager  
Tom Lunke, Urban Planner

## **WORKSHOP CO-SPONSORS, PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS**

NYC Department of Transportation  
The Office of NYC Council Member Erik Bottcher  
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CHEKPEDS  
Foragers Market  
The Copper Still  
New London Pharmacy  
Mario Nico Salon  
Gristedes  
St. Paul's German Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Collective for Community, Culture and Environment  
Volunteer Facilitators and Supporters  
Community Visioning Workshop Participants

## **REPORT**

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# *Introduction and Project History*





In late 2019, an airborne COVID-19 virus of unknown origin was spreading rapidly throughout China. By March 2020, it had spread worldwide and led to the shut-down of most economic activity within New York City. Without an antidote, fear spread, and social distancing became mandatory.

The New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) responded by developing an Open Street program to provide needed safety and separation of individuals as they traversed the city. Since most sidewalks were narrowed in the 1950's to make room for vehicular storage and mobility on the city streets, it was determined that some streets needed to be repositioned for pedestrian priority. A call was put out to seek community partners in the selection of these streets.

Transportation activist, Ms. Melodie Bryant, whose home is on West 22nd Street, between 7th and 8th avenues, answered the call and applied for her street to become a Limited Local Access Open Street with the help of the Chelsea West 200 Block Association and CHEKPEDS. In May 2020, her application to DOT was approved and so began the process of evolving this street into one that prioritizes pedestrians and bicyclist over vehicular use during the hours of 8AM to 8 PM, seven days a week with a 5 MPH speed limit.

In May 2021, one year after the Open Street became operational, and seeing that there was a need for further outreach within the community to determine how this street could evolve, Ms. Bryant enlisted the support of Transportation Alternatives and surveyed 156 people over a two-week period standing at the intersection of West 22nd Street and 8th Avenue.

Of those who responded to the survey (see full survey in Appendix 3):

- 93% supported the Open Street and live in the neighborhood
- 87% found it to be quieter than before it was implemented
- 76% wanted more trees and greenery
- 67% don't own a car
- 66% found it to be cleaner than before



- 65% found it to be safer than before
- 64% live on the West 22nd Open Street block
- 62% did not want to help maintain the 8th Avenue entrance gates
- 49% wanted protected seating on the street
- 48% wanted a 5 MPH speed limit on the street

In 2022, NYC DOT received a federal infrastructure grant to be used for improving the city's Open Streets. Ms. Bryant, with the assistance of the block association, applied for and was granted some of these funds. CHEKPEDS agreed to be the fiscal conduit for this grant.

In May 2022, Ms. Bryant and others replaced the city-donated French Barricades with lighter weight, linked fences that could swing open as gates and slide easily on flat footings. Volunteers designed attractive vinyl decorative sleeves to cover the metal gates and placed them alongside large city-donated heavy plastic urns filled with seasonal plants and small trees maintained through a city contract with The Horticultural Society of New York.



Near the end of June 2022, in celebration of LGBTQ+ Pride, Ms. Bryant enlisted the support of Barracuda Lounge and neighborhood residents to chalk two rainbow flags and hearts on the pavement near the 8th Avenue entrance to the Open Street. Barracuda has been an active LGBTQ+ small business and cultural fixture in the community since Chelsea hosted the international Gay Games in 1994.

In August 2022, Ms. Bryant hired the Collective for Community, Culture and Environment to work in partnership with Tom Lunke Studio to develop a West 22nd Open Street Community Visioning Workshop. Mr. Lunke and Ms. Bryant canvassed the businesses along the Open Street and 7th and 8th avenues, between 21st and 23rd streets, to gain support and place flyers in their windows. The workshop took place in St. Paul's German Evangelical Lutheran Church on October 15, 2022 for 2 ½ hours. Of the 63 people that attended, 2 were organizers, 11 were facilitators and 50 were general participants.



The rules of engagement were set, a slide presentation was given, and participants sitting at eight tables were asked to follow the lead of each table's facilitator so that there would be a written record of input on how the Open Street could be redesigned to meet the ever-changing needs of the neighborhood and city. (See Appendix 1)

We received over 550 individual and table group responses written on individual worksheets, a large base map of the Open Street, and a large flip chart. Each table presented their findings to the full assembly of people in the room and were thanked by the workshop organizers for the thoughtfulness and for volunteering their valuable time. Refreshments donated by local restaurant, The Copper Still, located at the intersection of West 22nd Open Street and 7th Avenue, were provided to all attendees.

Each written response was entered into a spreadsheet and collated based on subject themes and a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities or Threats (SWOT) analysis. The four themes were (see Appendix 1):

- Entrances, Signage, and Traffic Management
- Neckdowns with Trees, Plantings and Benches
- Plazas and Street Amenities
- Open Street Management and Activities

The participant's responses have informed the three street redesign proposals. Option A is the preferred proposal, with B and C as alternatives.

The gates at the 8th Avenue entrance to the Open Street was the number one concern of workshop participants, with some wanting them to be removed entirely or redesigned to be automatic. These are explored in our redesign options. Option A uses a street design concept originated in The Netherlands called a Woonerf. It has been applied in Manhattan as a Shared Street on Broadway near the Flatiron building, at University Place and Union Square West. This design approach involves creating physical and visual diversions, such





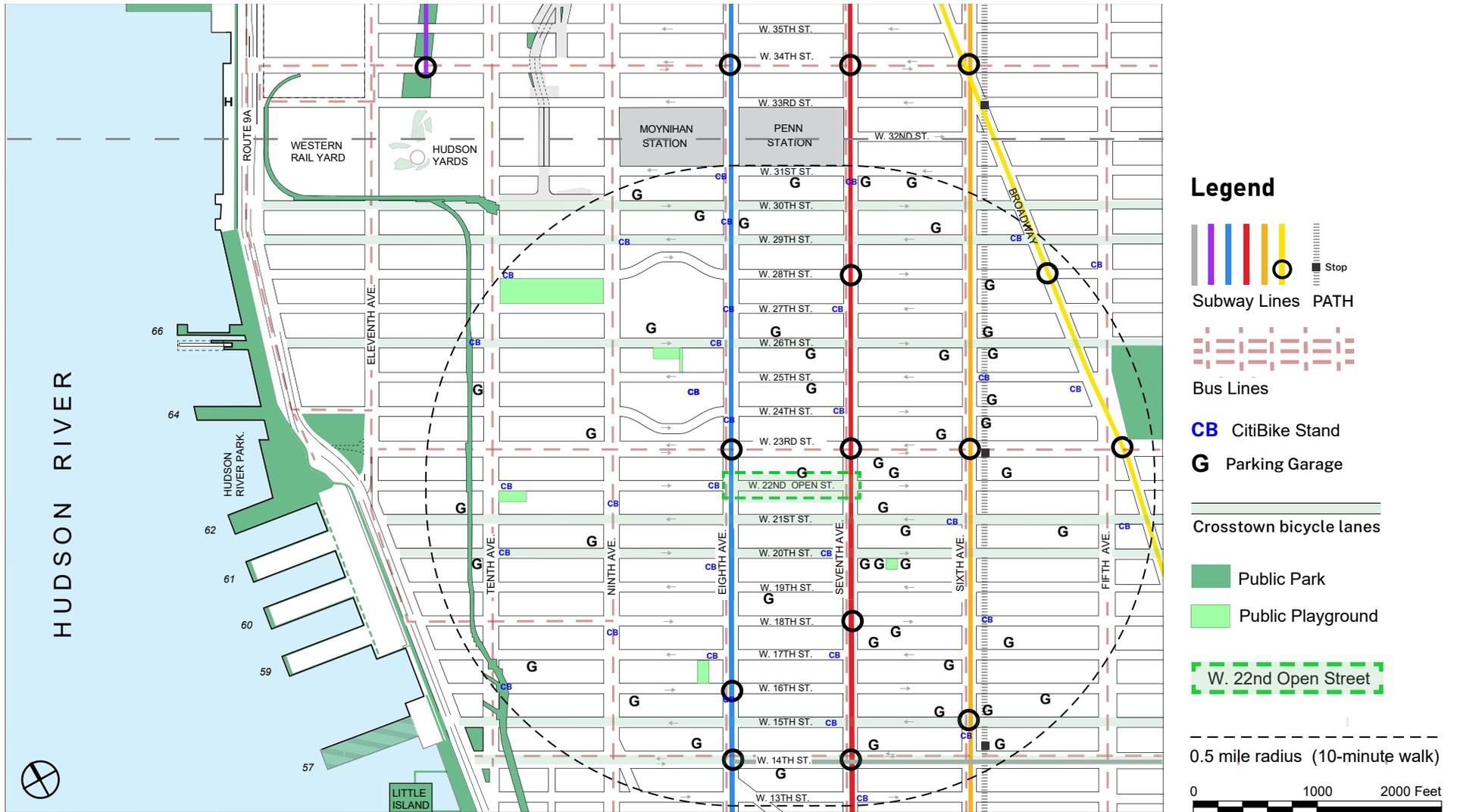
as trees, planters and seating areas, along the street to guide the driver safely through at a maximum speed of 5 MPH, a speed that most survey respondents and workshop participants favored.

Options A and B differ only in that A follows the complete removal of the curb separating the street from the sidewalk and B keeps the curb in place. Both options place pedestrian use and safety at the forefront of the redesign.

Option C provides expanded and protected tree plantings and seating without the same level of street redesign that would require a 5 MPH speed limit. This requires some sort of automated gate at the 8th Avenue entrance, either in a physical or electronic (EZ-Pass) form.



# Context Map



This map highlights the abundance of mass transit options for people who do not drive. It also shows the lack of open space dedicated to adults in an area of high density, where 91% of residents do not have children. The nearest publicly-owned open spaces within a 10-minute walk of West 22nd Open Street are five playgrounds for kids and youths. The remaining publicly-owned open spaces are at the periphery, leaving only the streets for recreational use by the majority of community residents, local employees and tourists.

# Existing Conditions and Demographics





The West 22nd Open Street physical character and demographics are as follows:

- A large canopy of trees covers most of the 800-foot-long block, with trees decades old, and some newer ones planted within the last 10 years.
- The street is zoned for commercial and residential use on the north side of the street and residential only on the south side of the street; except for a commercial overlay zone covering the first 100 feet in from the avenues.
- 78% of the residential buildings facing West 22nd Street are multifamily.
- There are seven active small businesses and three vacant commercial storefronts at street level. As many people work from home, there are likely other small businesses within the residential buildings that are not at street level and therefore cannot be visibly confirmed.
- There are approximately 962 people living in the residential buildings. Sources: StreetEasy for building units (566) and Census Reporter for average household size (1.7) within 10011.
- There is on-street parking space for 60 vehicles.
- An 80-foot-long loading and unloading only zone stretches along the southern curb from the 8th Avenue intersection eastward.
- One accessory commercial parking garage under a 150-unit apartment building contains 85 spaces that are leased monthly, weekly, daily and by the hour at prices above the rate of most parking garages in the area.
- There is one active private townhouse garage that holds one vehicle, and one private townhouse that used to hold a one vehicle garage and is now under reconstruction.
- There is one small loading dock used for trash and the storage of one vehicle attached to the Cinépolis Luxury Cinemas that has its main pedestrian entrance on West 23rd Street.



A 2020 demographic analysis of the Chelsea zip code 10011, including West 22nd Open Street, is provided by the Census Reporter:

- Total population of 50,228
- Average age of 42 years
- 75% of residents are between the ages of 18 to 64, with an additional 16% over 65 years of age for a total of 91% of the population being of adult age.
- Modes of Travel to Work:
  - 5% Drove Alone
  - 1% Carpooled
  - 51% Used Public Transit
  - 3% Bicycled
  - 22% Walked
  - 4% Used Another Source
  - 14% Worked from Home
- 52% of residents are non-family households and 37% are of married couples
- 24% of the residents moved into 10011 before the year 2000
- 97% of residential buildings are multifamily
- 81% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, with 41% having a post-graduate degree

In summary, our neighborhood is primarily made up of highly educated single adults without children who rarely, if ever, drive a car.

# *Alignment with NYC Policy and Best Practices*





The West 22nd Open Street redesign aligns with official New York City policies as outlined in the December 2021 NYC Streets Plan and the 2020 NYC DOT Street Design Manual for Shared Streets (see Appendix 5). It also incorporates existing best practices in urban street design implemented worldwide, and 21st Century modeling of safe and pedestrian-friendly public spaces in dense urban environments. The larger issue of climate change is addressed through repurposing of these Open Streets by returning them to pedestrian-oriented public spaces and removing the mid-20th Century retrofits which turned them into private space for vehicular storage and movement. (See Appendix 4 for the 1996 New York Times story on pre-1950s street design)

As stated in the NYC Streets Plan:

“As part of OneNYC’s commitment to become carbon-neutral by 2050, the 2019 OneNYC update [NYC’s comprehensive masterplan for addressing climate change] included specific transportation mode shift goals to reduce the use of single-occupancy vehicles and increase the use of more efficient and sustainable modes such as public transit, walking, cycling, and cleaner freight movement.”

The three design options seek to reduce the use of private vehicular storage and movement through the Open Street to enhance alternative means of transportation and improve health, safety, and quality of life for everyone. Many studies have shown the effects heavy private vehicle traffic have had on the physical and emotional wellbeing of living within the confines of such street usage. Transportation Alternatives (TA), in its NYC Street Renaissance Campaign, referenced late University of California, Berkeley professor, Donald Appleyard’s seminal urban planning book, *Livable Streets* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1981), stating the following improvements that occur when public streets are reverted back to primarily serve pedestrians:



### **Stronger Local Economies**

- Shoppers are walkers. Improved pedestrian life supports local businesses and jobs.
- Street investments enhance real estate values and increase the tax base.

### **A Sense of Community**

- Great streets create emblematic places that define communities.
- Sidewalks serve as public venues shared by people of diverse ethnicities and ages.
- Vibrant streets encourage local pride and volunteerism.

### **Improved Safety and Security**

- Making neighborhood safer for pedestrians and bicyclists saves lives.
- More eyes on the street reduces actual crime and increases residents' sense of security.

### **Better Access for All**

- Reduced emphasis on cars and parking makes transit, walking, and biking more viable options.
- Walkable streets are comfortable public settings for people of diverse abilities.
- Community assets, jobs, and services become more accessible.

### **Healthier Cities**

- Wise Development
- Investing in streets makes efficient use of existing infrastructure.
- Increased foot traffic attracts new development and businesses.
- Success fosters ongoing investment.

In summary, Professor Appleyard quantified the impact of vehicular traffic on social ties and found that people who live on low trafficked streets:



- Had more friends
- Knew more neighbors
- Felt greater pride and stewardship of their environment

San Francisco urban planner Allan Jacobs, a co-author with Appleyard, was quoted in the TA report, saying:

“Sociability is a large part of why cities exist, and streets are a major if not the only public place for that sociability to develop.”

He also was quoted as saying:

“If we can develop and design streets so that they are wonderful, fulfilling places to be— community-building places, attractive for all people—then we will have successfully designed about one-third of the city directly and will have had an immense impact on the rest.”

The TA report also asks why in Manhattan

“where over half of all commuters walk or use transit, and only 6% of all shopping below 59th Street involves a car, why do we dedicate so much street space to vehicles?”

Regarding the reduction of private vehicular space and the concern of those who believe the traffic previously handled on West 22nd Open Street will spill over onto other nearby streets, the TA found that

“although many people predicted that closing the road to cars at the north side of Trafalgar Square [London] would cause a traffic disaster in surrounding areas, no such spillover congestion occurred.”

This result has been duplicated in many cities and neighborhoods, including Greenwich Village in the 1950’s, when Jane Jacobs and others won the closure of a street through Washington Square Park, even though Robert Moses warned that the rest of the Village would suffer from its displaced car traffic; which didn’t occur.

In closing, the TA report states:





“New York City streets are suffering under outdated and auto-centric policies that fail to meet the social, economic, health and cultural needs of this great city. Fortunately, it doesn’t have to stay this way. Streets are our greatest public space and greatest public asset; improving these spaces is the simplest way to improve the quality of life for every New Yorker.”

As the official government NYC Streets Plan states:

“We recognize that our streets not only support the movement of people and goods, but are also places where people work, play, and interact with others. We are dedicated to creating environments that acknowledge these human needs. This is done by creating streets that are pleasant not only for walking through but also experiencing in other ways. In some instances, this means reclaiming road space entirely or limiting access for certain types of vehicles or during certain times of day. High-quality design, and amenities such as seating and landscaping are necessary to create safe and comfortable environments where people want to spend time.”

In addition to providing quality space on West 22nd Open Street for pedestrians, redesign options A and B propose incorporating the NYC Streets Plan recommendations regarding the placement of public art, rain gardens, permeable paving, trash containerization and composting.

# Workshop Proceedings and Design Options A, B and C





The West 22nd Open Street redesign options follow the principles laid out in the NYC DOT Street Design Manual – Shared Street section (See Appendix 5):

“Also known as a “pedestrian-priority” street, a shared street is a roadway designed for slow travel speeds where pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists all share the right of way. Typically employed on low vehicle volume and/or high pedestrian volume streets, vehicles are advised to drive 5 mph, and the roadway may be flush from building line to building line, separated by bollards or pedestrian amenities rather than the typical curb line grade separation. Slow speeds are encouraged through traffic calming, signage, and use of furnishings, plantings, and other visual cues in the roadway that caution drivers. Street users generally negotiate the right-of-way cooperatively rather than relying on traffic controls, allowing the entire street to effectively function as a public space. Shared streets can be designed and managed in a variety of different ways to balance the needs of all users while enhancing the safety, aesthetics, and overall experience of the street.”

This NYC DOT description can also be applied to Dutch Woonerf design.

Unlike other Shared Streets within Manhattan, the West 22nd Open Street is primarily in a residential zone with a collection of small businesses clustered primarily at the intersections with 7th and 8th avenues. Since many residential streets sandwiched between heavily trafficked avenues and subway lines have high volumes of vehicular traffic, especially those located in tourist areas, such as Chelsea, and near crosstown bus lines, the redesign of West 22nd Open Street can be a model for other primarily residential streets throughout the city with similar conditions.



Manhattan streets were not designed for the level of vehicular traffic they currently endure. The Commissioners' Plan of 1811 was created before the automobile existed. Streets were designed for pedestrians, horses, and wheeled carts and wagons. Speeds were limited to how fast a horse could gallop. One could effectively share this publicly owned space without too much concern for getting injured or killed. The rise of the automobile in the 20th Century changed all that, making people fear their public right of way, remaining constantly on guard for the potential of swift danger.

With limited resources to purchase private property to create needed open space that meets climate goals and public health needs, the city has successfully focused on repurposing existing publicly owned streets through various programs such as Open Streets, Shared Streets and Plazas. These streets, which are designed and operated by city government and often maintained by volunteers, are the de facto solution to expanding pedestrian open space in dense urban neighborhoods.

**Option A** (see drawing on page 24)

This is the preferred option for the West 22nd Open Street redesign. It incorporates the Shared Street or Woonerf model by creating a curb-less street the width and length of the public right of way from 7th to 8th avenues. The street is raised to the current curb level, with an additional slightly raised platform at the entrance to the 235 West 22nd Street garage, to alert drivers of the need to slow down as they use this new type of Shared Garden Street.

Safety measures such as bollards, ornamental and/or community garden planter boxes and urns, trees, seating, pedestrian-scaled lighting, rumble strips and other path delineating devices can be used to slow the driver. Extending the pedestrian space from the existing sidewalk into the street also reduces the width of the vehicular moving path while still providing smooth access for Fire, Sanitation and Police services at a design speed of 5 MPH.





The crosswalks and plazas at the 7th and 8th avenue intersections can be paved with colorful and textured patterns that are more durable and environmentally friendly than the standard epoxy asphalt covering. Lighting can be placed under trees to give a special artistic and welcoming aspect to these spaces. The remainder of the street can also be paved with artistic patterns to further delineate it from standard streets. A simple signpost can be placed at the 8th Avenue entrance alerting drivers and pedestrians to the new type of street. The existing loading zone on the south side of the street near the 8th Avenue intersection can be moved to 7th and/or 8th avenues. On-street parking can be reduced by 75%, allowing 16 vehicles to be parallel parked.

The Open Street can become a model for intergenerational interaction and social bonding that reduces isolation and depression. Seating under shade trees can reduce the effects of Heat Island buildup, while additional plantings around expanded tree pits can improve air quality and reduce the effects of noise pollution. Amenities such as bioswales, rain gardens and other green infrastructure can reduce stormwater runoff and improve the ecosystem, especially for bird and butterfly flight paths. Other amenities such trash, recycling and composting containers can improve sanitation.

Urban outdoor stretching stations common in cities such as London, Rio de Janeiro, and Seattle can be placed along the street as amenities for the multitude of neighborhood joggers and storefront training gyms. Secure bicycle storage corrals and small delivery zones for micro-mobility devices such as cargo bikes can reduce the need for vehicles to use the street.

Materials used in the development of this primarily residential Shared Garden Street can be sustainably produced, adaptable to other neighborhoods, made of high-quality low maintenance material and be durable for decades of use. New types of CityBenches that have narrow seats, and are designed to surround tree pits in a circular manner are preferred to the existing standard, as they can provide a perch for



resting in the shade while discouraging long-term lounging. This is an important amenity for the abundance of area seniors who enjoy strolling through the neighborhood and compliments the NYC Department of Transportation designation of Chelsea as a senior safety zone.

**Option B** (see drawing on page 25)

This option for the West 22nd Open Street redesign incorporates all the amenities mentioned in Option A but retains the existing street curb and reduces the resurfacing of the street to the plaza areas. This is seen as a temporary option, using temporary materials available until the full amenities and design changes outlined in Option A can be implemented.

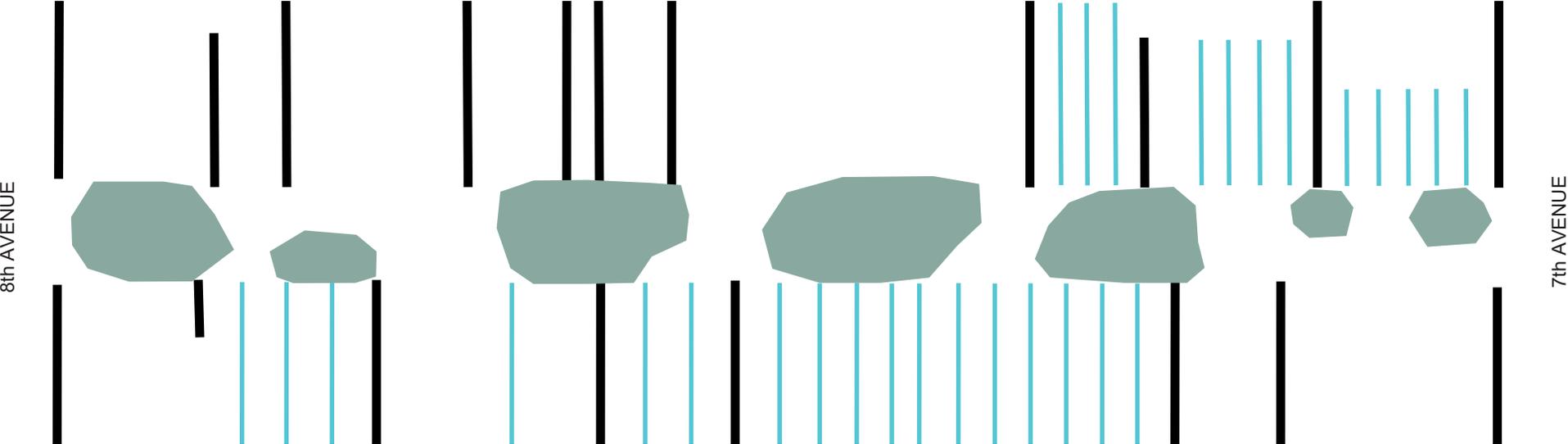
**Option C** (see drawing on page 26)

This option is included in the report as a minimally invasive approach to the redesign of West 22nd Open Street. Because it does not include all the horizontal and vertical amenities outlined in Option A that are intended to slow the driver's speed to 5 MPH, some form of automatic or electronic gate, either in physical or camera form, would be needed near the 8th Avenue entrance.

The northern and southern sidewalks would be widened in certain areas to over 20 feet each and the vehicular path would be narrowed to allow for emergency and sanitation vehicles but not be wide enough for double parking. Raised crosswalks and plazas would be placed at the 7th and 8th avenue intersections. In the mid-block, flexible open space areas with planters and seating, and a wide textured speed hump in front of the 235 West 22nd Street garage entrance, would provide some added pedestrian amenities.

This is not a preferred alternative as it requires the continued maintenance of a gate system and doesn't meet the goals and objectives of street design outlined in the Alignment with NYC Policy and Best Practices chapter of this report.

# Shared Garden Street - Rhythm



**LEGEND**



Tree Canopy Cover - Light and Shade on Street

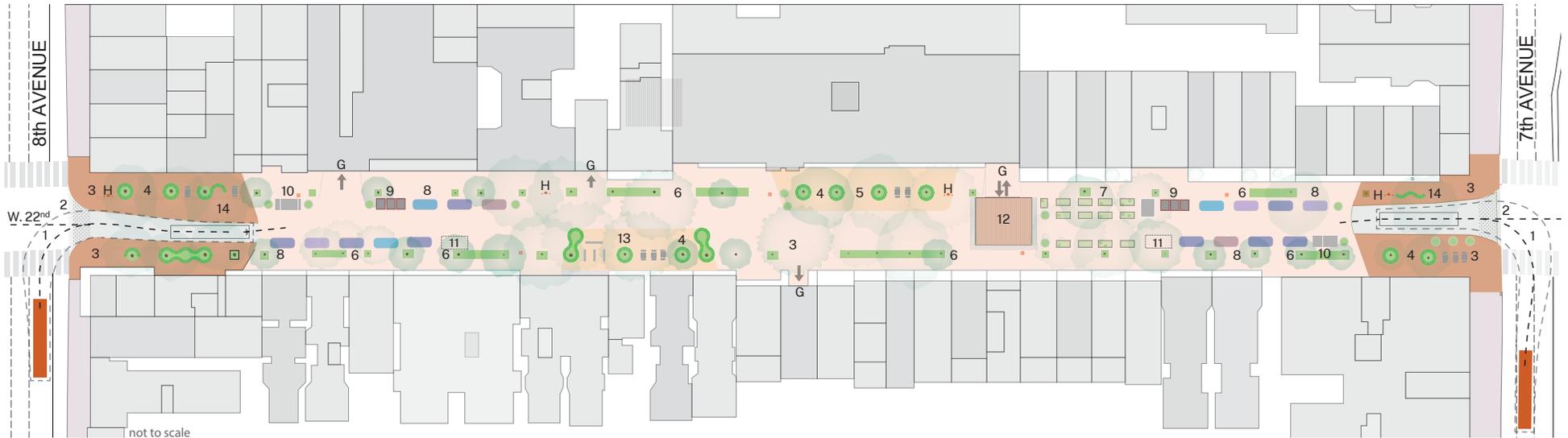


Small Building Facade Rhythm



Large Building Facade Rhythm

# Shared Garden Street – No Gate & Curbless – Option A

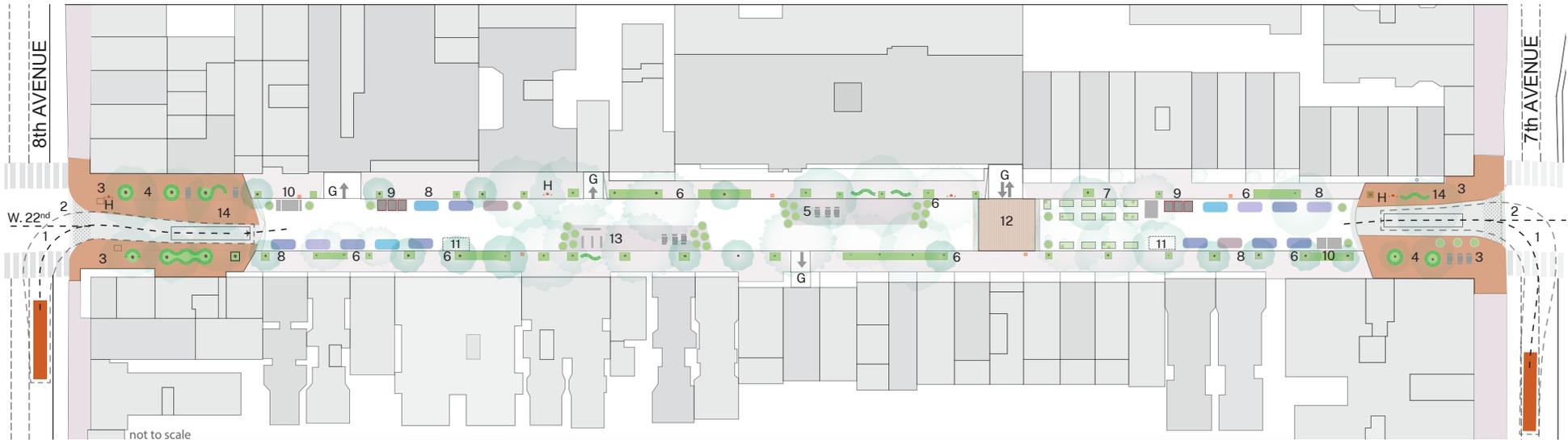


## LEGEND

- 1 NYC Firetruck Turning Radius
- 2 Raised Crosswalk
- 3 Curbless Plaza & Street with Textured Colorful Paving
- 4 Curvy Benches surround Trees
- 5 Flexible Landscaped Seating Area
- 6 Infiltration Planter/Treepit
- 7 High Planters or Community Garden
- 8 On-street Parking Spaces
- 9 Containerized Garbage + Composting Bins
- 10 Secure Bike Storage
- 11 Micro-mobility Parking Spot
- 12 Wide Speed Hump with Textured Colorful Paving
- 13 Flexible Area with Stretching Equipment
- 14 Pedestrian-scale Lighting throughout

G Existing Garage or Loading Dock  
 H Existing Fire Hydrant

# Shared Garden Street – No Gate – Option B

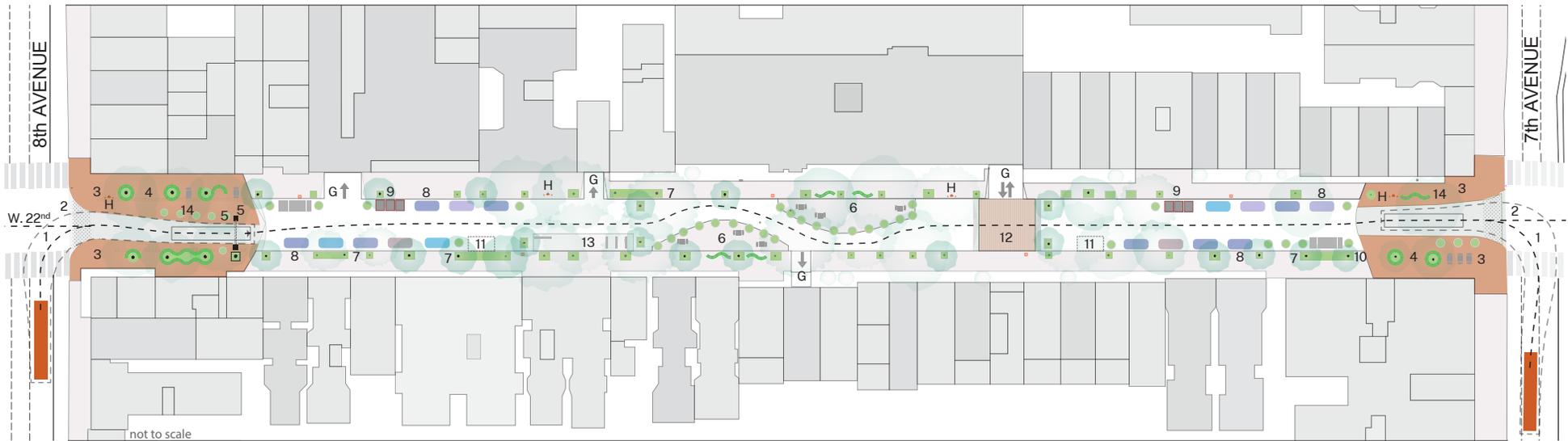


## LEGEND

- 1 NYC Firetruck Turning Radius
- 2 Raised Crosswalk
- 3 Curbsless Plaza with Textured Colorful Paving
- 4 Curvy Benches surround Trees
- 5 Raised Flexible Landscaped Seating Area
- 6 Infiltration Planter/Treepit
- 7 High Planters or Community Garden
- 8 On-street Parking Spaces
- 9 Containerized Garbage + Composting Bins
- 10 Secure Bike Storage
- 11 Micro-mobility Parking Spot
- 12 Wide Speed Hump with Textured Colorful Paving
- 13 Raised Flexible Area with Stretching Equipment
- 14 Pedestrian-scale Lighting throughout

G Existing Garage or Loading Dock  
 H Existing Fire Hydrant

# Shared Garden Street – Automatic Gate – Option C



## LEGEND

- 1 NYC Firetruck Turning Radius
- 2 Raised Crosswalk
- 3 Curbless Plaza with Textured Colorful Paving
- 4 Curvy Benches surround Trees
- 5 Automatic Entrance Gate
- 6 Flexible Landscaped Seating Area
- 7 Infiltration Planter/Treepit
- 8 On-street Parking Spaces
- 9 Containerized Garbage + Composting Bins
- 10 Secure Bike Storage
- 11 Micro-mobility Parking Spot
- 12 Wide Speed Hump with Textured Colorful Paving
- 13 Flexible Area with Stretching Equipment
- 14 Pedestrian-scale Lighting throughout

G Existing Garage or Loading Dock  
 H Existing Fire Hydrant

# Conclusion





Analysis of the comments received by the participants at the West 22nd Open Street Community Design Workshop revealed a desire to improve the aesthetics, usability, and safety of the Open Street for both pedestrians and vehicular drivers. A main concern was the operation of the existing manual safety gates at the 8th Avenue entrance to the street. While much of the community has voluntarily adopted and maintained the gates for 2 ½ years, there have been times of intense conflict.

The early DOT-issued gates were more like French Barricades that were heavy to move and often required lifting. In 2022, the community replaced them with a lighter weight linked fence system that allows the gates to slide on flat footings with relative ease. This reduced the conflict significantly and led to more pedestrians and drivers willing to open and close the gates. Some people, however, believe that the gates need to be removed entirely, while others like the way they discourage through traffic and allow pedestrians to walk, run, bicycle, and play in the middle of the street.



Doing further research into street design after the workshop, it was determined that the street could be maintained as a safe space for all users without gates if it were designed in such a way as to reduce the ability of vehicles to move faster than 5 MPH. Those wanting an expeditious route across the island could choose a multitude of nearby eastbound streets, while those needing to use the Open Street for local use could easily traverse it at a slow and safe speed without the inconvenience of getting in and out of their vehicle to move the gates.

We've created three options for the community and city officials to consider (see drawings on pages 23 to 26):

**Option A** – create a Woonerf style Shared Garden Street with enhanced pedestrian space to make the street welcoming to those who choose to sit, socialize, and enjoy a calmer atmosphere in a park-starved neighborhood that holds over 50,000 residents and thousands of workers, tourists, and other visitors daily.



**Option B** – create a similar street to what is proposed in Option A but keep the sidewalk curbs intact.

**Option C** – create a pedestrian-priority street with less of the calming features outlined in Options A and B. This is the only option that would require electronic gates at the 8th Avenue entrance to ensure the safety of pedestrians and drivers alike.

Our preference is for Option A to be implemented by New York City, as it meets the needs of most residents and is aligned with best practices in urban street design and official New York government policies.