

**Lowline Community Engagement  
Public Workshop 3 (Programming)  
Breakout Session Timing: 1 hour**  
Prepared by Karp Strategies | April 6, 2017

**Workshop Date:** March 27, 2017, 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM

**Number of Attendees:** Approximately 37 people across 5 topic tables.

**Recruited by/Who were attendees:** A diverse mix of community members, as well as Community Advisory Board members.

**Facilitators:** Ali Sutherland-Brown, Erik Kath, Arlita McDonald, Malena Silva, Evelyn Thomas.

**Note takers:** Arielle Hersh, Nurjehan Mawaz-Khan, Konstantinos Psychogios, Karina Leung, Vivian Huang, Marti Richenstein

### **Introduction**

This memo is intended to provide a summary analysis of the ideas shared in the third Public Community Design Workshop conducted by Karp Strategies as part of the Lowline's formal community engagement process. The analysis here presents the ideas, themes, and concerns raised across five topic tables, and specific programming ideas for each topic. This memo then synthesizes feedback that resonated across the topic tables.

This document is not intended to be representative of the views of all members of CD3 or the Lower East Side, or to draw definitive conclusions regarding the needs of the community. It is presented as part of an iterative engagement process, and will be used alongside findings from other public community design workshops and small engagement activities to form a more complete picture over time.

### **Structure of the Workshop**

Public Workshop 3 was designed to focus on programming related to five topics: Health and Wellness, Recreation, Science and Technology, Arts and Culture, and Education. The goal of this workshop was to gain an understanding of how the community envisions using the Lowline. To this end, the five topics were chosen by analyzing community feedback from both the two past engagement meetings led by Karp Strategies and the Lowline's community work over the past several years.

Precedent images of activities, events, and programs were shown at each table to focus discussion about a given topic. Participants were asked to explain their immediate thoughts,

ideas, and concerns regarding these images, and what would or would not work at the Lowline – and why. Other ideas and discussion that arose at each table were also captured and analyzed.

### **Discussions at topic tables**

#### ***Health and Wellness (6 participants)***

To the participants at this table, the concept of health and wellness was embodied in a variety of ways, centering around physical, nutritional, and mental well-being. Some participants saw the Lowline as a space that could promote physical health by acting as a support system for healthy eating. Related programming suggestions included spaces and events dedicated to educating the local community about nutrition, sustainability, and the high cost barrier to eating healthy, and providing gardening and cooking lessons. The Lowline could fill a need for the community by providing them a place to garden and grow their own food – something participants mentioned they wanted to do, and currently did not have space for. Some participants also welcomed the idea of a farmer’s market, providing examples of the Union Square Greenmarket where vendors accepted EBT SNAP cards.

Some of the discussion centered on the unique challenge of being healthy in an urban area. Participants suggested that the Lowline could act as a green space ‘to just be’ – a space to retreat to or spend time in without having a purpose. In this scenario, the Lowline would be a hub for health as a getaway from the pressures of the city. On the more active front, participants suggested making the Lowline a space for physical activity, hosting yoga, tai chi, karate, and spin classes. Specific examples included the donation-based model of ‘Yoga to the People,’ a Bikram studio on St. Marks Place, and setting up transportable bikes for a spin class, as has been done on the High Line.

Participants further suggested programs that would support the provision of mental health care both by professionals and peers. Ideas included: providing spaces for access to therapists and counsellors; creating programs for new mothers to understand childcare; and creating a pilot program for peer-lead counselling for a range of issues.

Overall, this table broached the topics of education, recreation, and community development under a broad umbrella of health and wellness.

#### ***Recreation (8 participants)***

The Recreation table discussed a wide range of ideas across topics without reaching a consensus on many programming ideas. Indeed, this breadth was directly related to participants’ varying definitions of ‘recreation.’

Half of the participants agreed that board games and indoor sports activities would constitute a good use of the space. When presented with an image of chess players, they suggested that the

Lowline could act as a space to support all manner of games, including: life size board games, foosball, ping pong, billiards or pool, bowling, handball, bingo, arcade games, and baseball batting cages. Participants did not reach consensus for a particular game.

On the other hand, spaces for fitness-related activities were supported by all but one participant, with programming suggestions centering on the idea of a 'playground for adults.' Fitness class suggestions included acro-yoga, fitboard (a space efficient fitness class), and rock-climbing.

A second set of ideas generated for recreational programming centered on green spaces and their usage. Participants expressed the need for a space to simply unwind or 'hang out,' and suggested spaces to sit and relax amidst greenery, reading nooks, and trails for walking, running, walking dogs, and skateboarding. Other suggested recreational uses included exhibits and activities that celebrated the Lowline's history as a trolley terminal, performance spaces for local musicians, film screenings, dance competitions, and recreational-educational events and programs such as wine tasting, knitting and sewing, and computer lessons.

This table also discussed potential partnerships and activities that could generate funding for the Lowline. Participant ideas included a mix of permanent and temporary events, vending stalls and shops, and activities, such as coffee shops, an art gallery, a flea market or street fair, Christmas Town, a book fair, fashion shows or concerts, photo booths, and rentable venue spaces. To achieve these uses and more, the participants suggested partnering with organizations such as Henry Street Settlement, the LES Girls Club, GreenThumb, the Educational Alliance, Hester Street Fair, local libraries (for book swaps), and corporate sponsors who might donate food, beverages, construction supplies, or plants.

### ***Science/ Technology (7 participants)***

At this table, participants grappled with what science and technology could mean to them, and how this subject could manifest in the Lowline. Participants understood the integral role that technology plays in the functioning of the Lowline, and proposed programming ideas that highlight this role. Much of the suggested programming revolved around educational exhibits, installations, and events, and were of a dual nature – those that highlighted how the Lowline functions, and others that could be programmed at the Lowline. Important areas of interest included sustainability, solar technology, aquaponics, permaculture and other cultivation technologies, urban planning, climate, and the environment.

While all users were considered, this table focused the majority of their discussion on school-age children and how educational programming could benefit them. Participants variously suggested after-school programs for local students, rotating science, technology and engineering exhibits that educate children and young adults about STEM-related matters, spaces for science classes and experimentation, and interactive installations. A seminal idea emerged through this discussion: representing the 'specialness' of the Lowline. Participants suggested creating exhibits

that would explain the history of public transportation in New York through the Lowline's past use as a trolley terminal. They also suggested presenting a 'window' into the services that make New York function by exposing the network of transport, electrical, plumbing, and other service infrastructure that exists underground, and possibly abuts the Lowline. They further suggested exhibits that explain the usage of solar technology in the Lowline. Supporting examples of these ideas included: the Transit Museum, which has displays of historical subways and carriage systems; activities at Brooklyn Bridge Park that allow children to interact with exhibits in large groups; and tours of the High Line that explain the architecture and vegetation in the space.

Participants made suggestions about the operation of the space, about maintaining continued interest, generating revenue, and managing crowds underground. There was an emphasis on the duration of exhibits, and a suggestion to create rotating programming, installations, and events to generate interest and ensure repeat visits. Participants emphasised the need for effective crowd control, and recommended taking lessons from museums in crowd management.

### ***Arts/ Culture (9 participants)***

This table ideated programming from the standpoint of creating and exhibiting art, and representing the cultural history of the Lower East Side. Participants explained what the topic meant to them in multiple ways; some focused on art as a product of culture, some on dialogue in art and the role of artists, and others on the logistics of achieving specific goals, such as prioritizing local talent. One participant raised questions about the purpose and nature of programming; and whether the space would be best served by increased flexibility and user control.

Participants expressed support for a range of specific programming ideas. There was broad support for the idea of a performance space, with participants suggesting that it be used as means of generating income for the Lowline. The table displayed interest in seeing interactive art installations at the Lowline, and spaces for film screenings, lectures, and seminars. Examples to support these ideas included the seasonal nature and changing exhibits in Madison Square Park, and presentations similar to those made by the Greenwich Village Historical Society. Participants raised questions about what services or equipment the Lowline could provide to support performers - such as specialized floors or lighting, freight elevators to move equipment, or seating for audiences. Furthermore, four out of nine participants supported a space to create art with seating for people who want to sketch or paint, and specifically suggested digital sketchpads as an opportunity to integrate technology and art.

A major theme in the discussion was optimizing the management of the Lowline to support local artists, and give the community a voice in the selection of art to be displayed. Participants supported corporate sponsorship to fund grants for local artists, governing the grants by partnering with a community advisory board to review artists' applications, and creating a portal

where the community could suggest and vote for programming every month. One participant expressed an opinion that the governance of art in the space would come to dictate its nature, and emphasized openness and democratic management.

### ***Education (7 participants)***

This table spoke about a range of crosscutting topics that emphasized education related to culture, food and urban agriculture, and design, among others ideas. In addition to fostering traditional adult and technical education, participants suggested enlisting local professionals and members of the community to create a program of peer-based education. The group emphasized the need to teach practical skills as part of educational programming.

Specific ideas related to food and nutrition education included partnering with the Essex Street Market, farmers' markets, and landscape contractors to create educational programming. This programming was envisioned as a series of hands-on classes and lectures about healthy eating, nutrition, food sourcing, and training for gardening and urban agriculture. Participants supported cultural education, suggesting dance and music lessons, programs to teach students about cultural traditions that may be missed in mainstream schooling, and spaces for cultural performances. Another suggestion was to create a job assistance and training program, where skills like construction and landscaping are taught.

Several participants showed up to the Education table prepared with articles, well-developed ideas, and ready to talk about strategic planning, funding, and partnerships with existing community organizations.

### **Themes across tables**

Across tables, participants continue to care about the following issues:

- Emphasizing localness, including prioritizing access for the residents of the Lower East Side, adequately representing their diverse history and culture, and growing the Lowline as a community.
- Ensuring that the context and history of the Lowline space is represented and celebrated.
- Ensuring a sustained interest in the Lowline through rotating programming.
- Solving the problem of a lack of space in the neighborhood for adults to 'hang out,' 'just be,' and simply relax.
- Making sure the Lowline is not overprogrammed, and there is a space for quiet.
- Balancing concerns of funding with those of access and free movement.
- Managing crowds and congestion in an underground space.
- Addressing how different age and user groups would use the space differently.
- Ensuring safety in an underground space, and the response to the threat of flooding.
- Designing for ventilation, lighting, and hygiene.