

Prospect Plaza

Brooklyn, New York

PROJECT DATA

LOCATION

MULTIPLE BLOCKS IN THE OCEAN HILL-BROWNSVILLE NEIGHBORHOOD OF BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

PROJECT STATUS

PHASE I COMPLETED IN 2016; FINAL PHASE SCHEDULED TO OPEN IN 2018

PROJECT TYPE

MIXED USE, PUBLIC HOUSING, AND AFFORDABLE MULTIFAMILY RENTAL

SITE SIZE

4.53 ACRES (1.83 HA)

PROJECT SIZE

406,400 SQUARE FEET (37,756 SQ M); 394 PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING UNITS; 23,000 SQUARE FEET (2,137 SQ M) OF RETAIL SPACE; 10,000-SQUARE-FOOT (929 SQ M) COMMUNITY FACILITY; 0.75-ACRE (0.3 HA) PUBLIC PARK

PROJECT COST

\$200 MILLION

DEVELOPMENT TEAM

BLUE SEA DEVELOPMENT, PENNROSE PROPERTIES LLC, DUVERNAY + BROOKS, ROSENBERG HOUSING GROUP, NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY

DESIGN TEAM

DATTNER ARCHITECTS

FINANCING

TAX-EXEMPT BONDS, TAX-CREDIT EQUITY, GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES

MENTAL HEALTH FEATURES

AFFORDABLE HOUSING, COMMUNITY CENTER, ON-SITE PUBLIC PARK

PHYSICAL HEALTH FEATURES

RAISED GARDEN BEDS, INDOOR AND OUTDOOR EXERCISE AND RECREATION AREAS, STAIRWAYS DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE USE, NEARBY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, BIKE PARKING, PLANNED SUPERMARKET

PROSPECT PLAZA is a mixed-use affordable housing redevelopment project spread over five buildings and three blocks in Brooklyn's Ocean Hill-Brownsville neighborhood. The \$200 million project is replacing a former New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) complex with a mix of nearly 400 public housing and affordable rental apartments, retail space, and community and recreational facilities designed to support resident health in a rapidly developing area with significant public health challenges.



Prospect Plaza's nearly 400 units of public and affordable housing are spread over five buildings and three blocks in Brooklyn's Ocean Hill-Brownsville neighborhood. *(Bernstein Associates)*

Context for Development

Area stakeholders and lead developer Blue Sea Development coalesced around a vision for a new Prospect Plaza with a mix of housing types, open space, and access to fresh food and active transportation facilities after a community planning workshop organized by the NYCHA in 2010.

Plans for the new Prospect Plaza centered on improving resident health outcomes—a particularly acute need, as the Ocean Hill–Brownsville neighborhood experienced the highest death rates in New York City caused by avoidable chronic health conditions as recently as 2012, according to the Office of Vital Statistics.

More than 40,000 families applied for Prospect Plaza’s first 110 residential units, which opened in 2016 and were reserved for families of four earning about \$51,000 per year. The strong demand illustrates the need for additional affordable housing in the region.

Health-Focused Features

Features to promote physical, mental, and community health at Prospect Plaza include the following:

- * **Affordable housing.** Affordable housing units support residential stability, which can lead to lower stress levels and improved health outcomes.
- * **Community gardens.** Raised garden beds allow residents to grow fresh, pesticide-free produce in an atmosphere that facilitates social interaction.
- * **Active staircases.** Stairwells are brightly lit and feature natural sunlight and a speaker system that plays music to encourage residents to take the stairs instead of elevators.
- * **Active transportation.** Prospect Plaza is located within walking and biking distance to public transportation and area businesses and services. Outdoor bike racks and long-term, secure indoor bike storage spaces facilitate resident bike ownership.
- * **Outdoor recreation areas.** Two outdoor recreation areas totaling 8,000 square feet (743 sq m) include fitness and playground equipment designed for children and adults to use side by side. A newly developed 0.75-acre (0.3 ha) park will be transferred to the New York City Department of Parks upon completion.
- * **Indoor fitness center.** A fitness center is available for residents to use at no charge.

- * **On-site grocery store.** A 24,000-square-foot (2,230 sq m) supermarket will open as part of the final phase of construction, giving residents easy access to fresh, healthy foods.
- * **Community center.** A two-story community center with a rooftop greenhouse will host neighborhood events.

Health Outcomes

Since the first phase of Prospect Plaza opened in 2016, the project has been recognized for incorporating design and programmatic elements that support the mental, social, and physical health of residents.

Prospect Plaza became the first multifamily affordable housing development to achieve “Active Design Verified” (ADV) status in 2016. Developers of affordable housing who commit to ADV—a joint initiative of the Center for Active Design and the Partnership for a Healthier America—receive training, technical assistance, verification of progress, and public recognition of success for developing housing designed to promote resident well-being.

In 2016, the Center for Active Design and Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai began studying the relationship between the design of Prospect Plaza and the health of its residents. While it is too early to cite results from this study, a similar 2014 study conducted at Arbor House, an affordable housing site in the south Bronx with active design features like those at Prospect Plaza that was also developed by Blue Sea, found a significant improvement in the number of women achieving “moderate physical activity levels” (as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), increased rates of stair use, and an overall increased feeling of safety among residents.

Given the very limited supply of affordable housing units aimed at supporting resident health, Blue Sea hopes that Prospect Plaza will provide a model for other developers, showing that healthier buildings lead to healthier residents. Bluestone explains, “Lower-income populations are much more vulnerable to financial hardship resulting from health issues. Projects designed to support resident health can provide much more stable environments.”

Bluestone continues, “This increased stability not only creates a great social return in keeping families healthy, but can also support a project’s financial success. A healthy building is beneficial to a building owner’s bottom line.”