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NEW YORK CITY

Flourishing at the Margins of Policy

At first glance, New York City would seem to be an inhospitable venue for active living initiatives. The city is choked with traffic, and its pedestrians are said to come in two varieties: the quick and the dead. Its physiognomy has been decisively shaped by the massive highway-building projects of Robert Moses, the master builder of Robert Caro's celebrated biography. And the city's late-twentieth-century mayoral leadership had many more pressing priorities—for instance, fighting crime, the top item on the agenda of Rudy Giuliani, mayor from 1994 to 2001—than the promotion of walking, biking, and other forms of physical exertion.

First impressions can mislead, however. Under both Michael Bloomberg, mayor from 2002 to 2013, and his successor, Bill de Blasio, the city launched several impressive programs that aimed to make walking and biking safer and more attractive and to augment physical activity in its schools and parks. This chapter explores the sources and outcomes of this civic activism.

PUBLIC HEALTH IN CITY HALL

That active living should find a niche on the agenda of Mayor Michael Bloomberg is unsurprising. Bloomberg believed that strong municipal leadership could do much to improve the health of local populations and (as demonstrated by the $500 million gift he had given to the School of Public Health, now named for him, at his alma mater, Johns Hopkins University) he recognized that public-health programs were central to the pursuit of that goal. Wealthy, widely traveled, and cosmopolitan, Bloomberg was well informed about the practices of other "global" cities such as London (where he had a home) and of international exemplars of best metropolitan practices. An official in the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) recalled that the mayor "saw the transportation angle—biking, walking, congestion pricing, and so on—as part and parcel of public health. He was interested in Copenhagen, which was doing great things with bikes. Active living was also a way to deal with climate change—healthy for you *and* good for the environment."

Like many other mayors (including those discussed in previous chapters), Bloomberg wanted his city to excel in competition for smart, young executive types, a growing number of whom were said to value walkability and the opportunity to make do without a car as part of an appealing urban lifestyle. And although few rank-and-file New Yorkers routinely ride a bicycle amid the city's "canyons of steel" (in the words of a song by Vernon Duke), many cover considerable ground on foot in the course of daily life, as do straphangers as they access and move about within the subway system. A prominent slice of elite opinion in New York insists that Jane Jacobs (iconic denizen of Greenwich Village, celebrator of urban density, and author of *The*

Death and Life of Great American Cities [1961]) may have lost some battles with Robert Moses in the postwar years but has in time won the war to shape the built environment. Moreover, much of the city's disproportionately liberal and Democratic electorate responds favorably to "causes" such as sustainability, greenness, New Urbanism, and smart growth, to which active living is generally viewed as complementary, even integral.

Bloomberg, moreover, not only "got" public health but also put it at the top of his mayoral agenda, remarking that the measure of achievement that meant most to him was the rise of life expectancy in the city's population. The mayor was committed to "doing something" about problems, not "wringing your hands"; wore a thick skin against bad publicity; and enjoyed a large personal fortune that gave him freedom from the need to solicit campaign contributions and into which he was prepared to dip to fight back against well-heeled obstructive groups. Armed with firm views about the vast potential of public health to prolong and improve lives in and beyond New York and eager to lead the profession from its traditional preoccupations into an assault on chronic diseases by means of an evidence-based commitment to prevention and health promotion, Bloomberg was increasingly recognized as "the nation's loudest public health advocate"—indeed, as its "biggest voice in health."[1]

The political prominence of public health in city hall created an institutional context in which the DOHMH was invited—indeed, expected—to craft policies that would demonstrably reduce mortality and morbidity within the five boroughs and could count on the support of top-level champions when the going got tough. Early successes in campaigns against smoking and unhealthy foods had, by 2007, won admiring national attention for the department, and the sense that "exciting things were happening" in it attracted talented people from a range of

disciplines and backgrounds to this "powerhouse of a health department . . . that broke news and set a national agenda in public health."[2] The agency's mission and national visibility, in short, extended an open invitation to public-health policy entrepreneurship.

These contextual considerations offered potentially fertile ground for active living initiatives, but their emergence was by no means automatic. Active living was not part of the core missions of the Departments of Transportation, City Planning, Design and Construction, Parks and Recreation, or Education, but "even a relatively minor public undertaking" may involve these and other agencies—"each with its own procedures, paperwork, and goals."[3] And although active living fell within the portfolio of the DOHMH, that capacious collection contained many other health-enhancing strategies, such as antismoking and healthy eating initiatives, with which active living competed for attention and resources. It competed, moreover, under a strategic disadvantage: the laws, regulations, and taxes that could be marshaled against smoking and unhealthy foods were applicable uneasily if at all in a public push to discourage physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyles.

Signs and omens in the early Bloomberg years did not seem to favor active living. The commissioner of the Department of Transportation, a holdover from the Giuliani years, was at odds with Transportation Alternatives, the city's leading advocacy group for pedestrians and cyclists. Health Commissioner Thomas Frieden outlined ten "priority areas," such as "be tobacco free" and "get checked for cancer," and although two goals ("keep your heart healthy" and "have a healthy baby") might be advanced by physical activity, the agenda made no explicit mention of active living or the built environment.[4] A review of the city's health activities between 2002 and 2007

had little to say on these matters, referring only to "physical activity programs" and "assessing fitness" as initiatives expected to promote child health.[5] In New York, as in many other communities, active living was on the municipal agenda but not high, still less uppermost, on the agendas of leaders of the Department of Transportation (DOT), of DOHMH, or indeed of any particular government official who enjoyed authority or influence.

Agenda-setting for active living got a boost in 2004 when Lynn Silver became assistant commissioner for chronic disease prevention and control in the DOHMH. Silver had recently perused research funded by the Active Living Research arm of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Active Living by Design program (published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* in 2005) and had been, as she recalled several years later, "impressed by [that research] for a decade." Surveying the scene at DOHMH, Silver found within the department some projects on worksite wellness and made plans to use the city's regulatory authority to require more play activities for kids in day care. But how to gain leverage on the built environment, for which policy responsibility sprawled across local (and state and federal) agencies, was not obvious.

Serendipitously, family connections kicked in. Urged by her cousin, an architect, to seek contacts within that profession, Silver discussed strategy with the wife of Rick Bell, president of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Bell agreed to collaborate with DOHMH and to convene a "Fit City" conference, to which architects, planners, and officials of city agencies were invited, to discuss how new approaches to design of the environment might make it more conducive to active living. The first year of the collaboration, Silver recalled, was "hard, and packed, but fun. The meeting was successful, the visual thinking of the

architects was great, but buy-in by the city agencies was low. We were not yet getting the public sector colleagues we would need."

The institutional prospects for collaboration brightened when in 2006 Silver met Karen Lee, a physician and public-health professional then working at the CDC on the prevention of chronic disease, who had delved deeply into the preventive properties of active living and the importance of the built environment in promoting it. Eager to elevate active living on the agenda of DOHMH, Silver hired Lee, who proved to be an energetic built-environment director and coordinator for active living initiatives in the department, encouraging the creation of a built-environment team to work on the issue and seeking to mobilize foundation support for their plans.

Lee pictured her role as that of a full-time active living specialist who framed issues in ways that elicited interorganizational and intersectoral cooperation. In an interview she explained that "you need a dedicated person to rally across the different departments. It has to be somebody's *job*, and the full-time aspect matters because it signals that it is important." Convinced that "the critical thing is structuring conversations, and how you do it," Lee began convening workshops and meetings at which representatives of a range of city agencies, organizations (such as Transportation Alternatives), and professional bodies (architects, for example) discussed the case for an active-living-friendly built environment, the evidence that policies seeking to promote active living yielded demonstrable gains for health and other social objectives, examples of best practices in other locales, and the broad outlines of projects that looked plausible for New York.

The meetings quickly tapped and then progressively generated enthusiasm among high city officials, increasing numbers of whom attended the annual Fit City conferences. One

DOHMHer, for example, remembered "fun meetings where we tossed around all sorts of ideas about stairs and windows and lines of sight, how sidewalks look, the ideas of a Danish architect who came to talk with us. It helped that DOHMH had no skin in the game: we could make the case, but we weren't anyone's competitor." Lee's framing and the AIA's engagement and convening paid off: agencies began to advance and accelerate strategies to promote active living within their own domains and in collaboration with others.

WALKING

For the city's energetic DOHMH, active living posed strategic challenges. One was organizational: the department's leaders well understood the health benefits of physical activity, but they had no direct responsibility for the supply side of the picture—the built environment, responsibility for the multiple parts of which spanned several departments: Design and Construction, Planning, Parks and Recreation, Buildings, Public Works, and above all, Transportation. Moreover, as noted above, the type of regulatory interventions they favored to promote healthy eating and discourage smoking—for example, taxes on cigarettes and requirements to post information on menus and food labels, which could be implemented through the city Health Code—could not easily be marshaled to shape the demand for active living. But the department's links with the AIA, which had hosted the above-mentioned series of annual Fit City meetings, paved a promising path for intervention and for partnerships with other city agencies.

A commitment made at a Fit City conference by David Burney, then commissioner of Design and Construction, inspired

the agency partners to coalesce around the creation of "active design guidelines" that showed how buildings in the city could be made more amenable to walking. These guidelines, designed and issued in 2010 with the participation of DOHMH, Design and Construction, City Planning, DOT, and the AIA, focused on identifying evidence-based changes in the urban built environment that could promote physical activity through design—for example, improvements in the signage, lighting, and safety of stairwells in ways that would make the stairs a more attractive alternative to elevators and escalators. The premise—that the most promising way to change behavior is, as an official explained, to "make the healthy choice the easiest choice . . . to 'bake it in'"—exemplified what has come to be called nudging and has extended into the sphere of active living a resolve to make "the healthy choice the default social option" and to change "toxic environments," a mission that also animated the administration's approach to discouraging smoking and the consumption of unhealthy foods.[6]

These plans did not go unopposed—questions arose about security, liability in case of falls, and compliance with fire codes, for instance—and the city's Department of Buildings had to be won over. But, fortified by an executive order from Mayor Bloomberg (who encouragingly noted that he made a point of taking the stairs in his five-story home[7]) city officials began redesigning stairwells in their own buildings. They then hoped to incorporate the guidelines in new construction contracts for city buildings and eventually in local building codes—a broader and more contentious proposition that evoked concerns about cost and elicited (as an interviewee put it) "the resistance of the private sector to regulation of any sort." Meanwhile, the active living planners sought to raise the awareness and appeal of such (re)design projects by creating a

Center for Active Design, by expanding a program launched by the DOHMH team and AIA to train architects in the precepts and practices of active living, by securing foundation funds to support this instruction, by running training sessions for housing developers, by presenting and explaining the guidelines, by offering visual examples of them in pamphlets and other publications aimed at both professional and community groups and boards, and by seeking legislation to increase parity between stairs and elevators in the rules governing construction and renovation of buildings.

Another strategy, begun under Bloomberg and continued by de Blasio, sought to encourage walking by redesigning outdoor public spaces. As a step toward the European-style Complete Streets that the middle class was said increasingly to favor, the creation of car-free plazas in busy areas such as Times Square—"peoples' playgrounds" (as a proponent put it)—promised to promote both active living and social cohesion. As one might expect, a dramatic reconfiguration of space shared by pedestrians, motorists, and cyclists stirred controversy. Critics charged that traffic diverted from its customary channels would clog streets nearby and that businesses would suffer. Supporters rejoined that by increasing the volume of foot traffic, the plazas would encourage shoppers; that drivers would learn to adapt (or, better still, find ways other than cars to get around); and that the plazas would promote active living, social integration, and kindred urbane virtues.

In 2015 it appeared that proponents had the better of the argument—at least to a point. Business owners in and around Times Square, Herald Square, and other sites of pedestrian plazas generally welcomed the new layout. And the altered flow of traffic had not proved to be paralytic (at least no more so than Midtown's customary gridlock).

On the other hand, the social composition of the plaza at Times Square had integrated into the flow of residents and tourists some problematic characters—namely, people suited up as cartoon figures (for instance, Elmo of Sesame Street)—who badgered passersby to have a picture taken with them and then demanded exorbitant fees for the service. When Elmo and his confreres were joined by scantily clothed women ("desnudas") who entertained and hustled the crowd, the integrative slope grew too slippery, and critics stormed the pages of the city's tabloids to denounce the whole project and demand that the plazas return to the status quo ante. "Mister Mayor, tear down this mall," thundered Denis Hamill in the *Daily News*, a sentiment seconded by columnist Linda Stasi, who declared that "the ridiculous pedestrian malls" forced on the city by "former Mayor Bloombucks" had "turned Times Square into Tits Square."[8] Mayor de Blasio's police commissioner, William Bratton, admitted that he would prefer "to just dig the whole damn thing up and put it back the way it was." And de Blasio himself appeared to wobble, opining that the plazas had "pros and cons" and deserved a "fresh look" by a task force.[9]

Other voices accentuated the positive: since the plazas opened in 2009, city records showed that "pedestrian injuries dropped 35 percent . . . [and] injuries to drivers and passengers in cars fell 63 percent. . . . Business boomed. Surveys reported leaps in satisfaction by residents, workers and tourists."[10] Proponents of the plazas, including the heads of Transportation Alternatives and the Times Square Alliance (a group of local businesses) urged the city to stay the course and deal with unsavory interlopers by tighter regulation of the public spaces in which they congregated.[11] As these supportive voices grew more indignant and insistent, Mayor de Blasio distanced himself from his musings

about a fresh look, and in 2016 city officials adopted regulations that created "designated activity zones" for commercial pursuits (such as those of Elmo and colleagues) and "pedestrian flow zones" for walkers.[12]

While sustaining the momentum of pedestrian-friendly initiatives launched by the Bloomberg team, de Blasio added another of his own, Vision Zero, a strategy he had endorsed in 2013 in the mayoral campaign, in which injuries and fatalities on the city's streets loomed large.[13] To enhance safety for pedestrians and cyclists, Vision Zero included a reduction of the legal speed limit within the five boroughs from thirty to twenty-five miles per hour, tougher legal penalties for drivers who injured or failed to yield to pedestrians and cyclists, and the redesign of especially dangerous streets and intersections.

The strategy, which won a $25 million grant from the federal government in 2014, reflected multiple and mixed motives. City hall relished the prospect of fewer lawsuits against the city. Families for Safe Streets, an organization akin to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, founded by relatives of pedestrians who had been struck down by cars, and described by an advocate as a "big game-changing interest group," fought hard to give the threat of "kills and serious injuries" high visibility. And Transportation Alternatives hoped that Vision Zero would bolster the case for a comprehensive strategy to develop Complete Streets—that is, streets that honored "the needs of all road users, including people walking, biking, taking public transportation and using automobiles, and people of all ages and abilities."[14] As usual, marketing of the initiative drew strength from causes and movements distinct from, but related to active living per se. "You get a lot farther selling safety than you do health," a participant remarked.

For two decades this selling had gone well in the city and beyond it. Pedestrian deaths nationwide between 1990 and 2009 had declined from 6,482 to 4,109. From 2009 to 2017, however, they rose by 45 percent, prompting a traffic expert to lament "a complete reversal of the progress that had been made."[15] In New York City, by happy contrast, pedestrian deaths continued to decline—from 144 in 2016 (slightly above the 139 deaths recorded in 2015) to 101 in 2017—the lowest number since 1910, when the city first recorded such events.[16] New York was certainly not immune to the factors most often cited to explain the national reversal: more SUVs and light trucks (more injurious in a crash); more trucks delivering packages ordered online; more congestion as Uber and other ride-sharing vehicles proliferated; and more drivers and pedestrians who are distracted by calls, texts, and news on their cell phones. Apparently Vision Zero was working, at least for walkers.

Moreover, even as the city seemed to dodge the threats that innovations in technology and transportation posed to the safety of pedestrians, two factors, also exogenous to active living policies, hinted at further progress. First, in February 2019 Mayor de Blasio and New York State's governor, Andrew Cuomo, agreed to implement congestion pricing on overabundant vehicles (such as taxis and ride-share cars) in designated parts of the city. The new pricing scheme—inspired by a congestion zone in London, which had since 2003 accelerated the speed of traffic, improved the quality of the air, and triggered increases in walking, biking, and the use of mass transit—conjured up, in the words of New York's DOT commissioner, Polly Trottenberg, "a lot of pretty transformative possibilities," including expanded sidewalks and pedestrian areas.[17] And second, a package of state and city laws, adopted in July 2019, that aimed to curtail

greenhouse gas emissions reinforced the appeals of the active living agenda.[18]

BIKING

Defining the proper physical and social place of bicycles in a city with an urban grid as dense and a flow of traffic as relentless as are those in New York has long divided public opinion. Naysayers (such as the curmudgeon who, in a letter to the *Daily News* urged Mayor Bloomberg to "make it illegal to ride a bicycle in the city"[19]) would consign bicycles to quiet country lanes and discourage their presence on packed city streets in which cars constantly jockey for advantage by seizing any available morsel of roadway. Advocates replied that the city's structural lack of hospitality to bikes is precisely why its leaders should be open to change: making bicycles and bike lanes more accessible would discourage the use of cars and thereby reduce pollution of the air, the drain on fossil fuels, the number of automobile collisions, the incidence of deaths and injuries to pedestrians, and—neither most nor least salient on the list of benefits—would also lead to improved fitness and health among the (presumably growing number of) citizens who cycled.

A master plan adopted in 1997 envisioned the construction of nine hundred miles of bike lanes and paths in the five boroughs, most of them under the authority of the DOT. Advocates for alternative transportation, however, viewed the Giuliani administration as hostile to them, an attitude they ascribed as well to Iris Weinshall, Giuliani's commissioner of DOT, whom Bloomberg initially retained. Bike enthusiasts invidiously compared Bloomberg's DOHMH, within which percolated ambitious

designs to combat smoking, trans fats, sugary drinks, and obesity, with his DOT, in which the expansion of bike lanes seemed far down the list of concerns.

In 2006 the bikers' frustrations spilled into the public domain when Andrew Vesselinovitch, DOT's bicycle program director, resigned and set forth in an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* his reasons for doing so.[20] The pace of installation of new lanes, of which 250 miles had been added between 1997 and 2004, had slowed to fewer than 20 miles between 2004 and 2006, he contended, adding that he found it unfortunate in a city in which half the population was overweight, "in part because of too little physical activity," and in which cars mightily depress the quality of the air that the DOT was "not truly committed to promoting bicycling."

A year later Weinshall stepped down as DOT commissioner and was replaced by Janette Sadik-Khan, a lawyer and former federal transportation executive, an ardent proponent of a bigger role for cyclists in local systems of transportation, and a plausible ally for active-living-minded officials in the DOHMH.[21] "Very different from the traditional traffic engineer," Sadik-Khan, said an admiring advocate, cleverly "wrangled the DOT bureaucracy" by proceeding on the assumption that "traffic engineers are smart, but they've been given the wrong problem to solve." Moreover, the new commissioner's wrangling took advantage of an unforeseen development that had triggered closer cooperation between the two agencies before she took office. In response to a demand by Transportation Alternatives that city hall study and report publicly on cyclist fatalities in the city, an official in DOHMH launched research on the issue, working "hand in hand" with DOT and with representatives of the police and the parks. "The process," a participant recalled, "was very transformative. We were four agencies plus Transportation

Alternatives. We analyzed those deaths in detail and wrote a report, which was a huge success and led to four commissioners standing in Central Park to announce a large expansion of bike lanes in New York City."

With Bloomberg's backing—and that of the public, 66 percent of which thought bike lanes a good idea[22]—Sadik-Khan announced plans to accelerate the installation of bike lanes in the five boroughs, a proposal that, as also was the case with the pedestrian plazas, elicited less than universal acclaim. Critics advanced the usual arguments: parking spaces, already scarce, would be fewer; the access of shoppers and workers to stores and offices would be encumbered; commutes would be slower and roads more congested; confrontations and collisions between cars and bikes would increase. Negotiations convened by city officials—including those in DOHMH district offices that were, an official explained, "designed to build trust"—with city councilors and neighborhood organizations tried to address these concerns and develop consent among residents affected. When plans for new bike lanes in a neighborhood in Brooklyn, for example, got a negative response, an official recalled how that district office "worked with community groups and the DOT. The office negotiated for the community, including its demands for improvements for pedestrians. As a result, they got more miles of bike lanes than they had expected." This cultivation of the grass roots was rewarded, and not only in Brooklyn. By 2015 the city had installed 1,000 miles of bike lanes, which it hoped to expand to 1,800 miles by 2030. Ridership, it noted, was up, and safety had improved.[23]

Between 2006 and 2019, bike trips in the city expanded from a daily average of 180,000 to 460,000—good news in that growing ridership brought cyclists both a stronger sense of safety in numbers and a larger constituency for cycle-friendly policies. On

the other hand, the increase clashed with the same coincident trends that also imperiled pedestrians—more motor vehicles crowded the streets as the economy recovered, deliveries of goods ordered on line soared, and mopeds multiplied.[24] The proliferation of ride-sharing services much accentuated the congestion: consultant Bruce Schaller found that "for every mile of personal-car driving the [ride-sharing] companies remove from the road in large U.S. cities, they add 2.5 miles of driving in a ride-sharing vehicle." Indeed, surveys showed that "roughly 60% of riders in Ubers and Lyfts would have walked, biked, taken public transit or stayed home if a ride-hail car hadn't been available."[25] In the summer of 2019 the delicate equilibrium between cars and cyclists appeared to be collapsing: in July three cyclists were killed by crashes, bringing the number of such fatalities in 2019 to fifteen, more than had transpired in all of 2018 (ten).[26]

Unsurprisingly, headlines screamed ("Linking Death to Bike Battle") and advocates wondered "What Happened to the Bike Safety Push"?[27] The de Blasio administration deplored the carnage, assigned about one hundred new city transportation workers to address the issue, and pledged to speed the construction of new bike lanes (which occupied 1,243 miles amid the city's 6,000 miles of streets) from 20 to 30 miles each year.[28] Cycling advocates greeted these promises with restrained applause. More lanes were needed, to be sure, but the lanes should be *protected* from the flow of traffic (which was the case for only about one-third of the city's lanes in 2019). And the protection must be designed to avert accidents. If the lane "runs between a curb on the right and parked cars on the left . . . cars traveling to the left of the parked vehicles have no clear view of what may be coming along in the bike lane, and cyclists in that lane have limited ability to see a driver who turns right and fails to slow down enough to avoid a collision."[29] Nor is that all: lanes should be not

only (properly) protected but also *connected*, thus relieving bikers of annoying stops and starts. The circle of political life whirled on: Each advance triggered more challenges, more demands, more promises, and more critical scrutiny of the city's willingness and capacity to meet them. "The devil," averred one advocate "is in the implementation."[30]

The city also made bikes more accessible to residents and tourists by means of a public–private partnership, the Citi Bike program, launched in 2013 with start-up funds from Citibank, under the oversight of DOT and the management of NYC Bike Share, a not-for-profit group. The program—said to be the city's "first new wide-scale public transportation option in more than half a century"[31]—let riders use a credit card to rent a bike at various sites around the city for a specified time and then return the bike to any Citi Bike location. Convinced that (in the words of former transportation commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan) "You can never do enough outreach," DOT sought to mobilize public consent (in 2012, 74 percent of respondents told pollsters that they supported Bike Share) by launching a "long term public dialogue" and "an exhaustive and highly participative planning process" that included 159 public meetings, presentations, and demonstrations; another 230 meetings with elected officials, property owners, and other stakeholders; an interactive station planning map that elicited more than ten thousand suggestions for siting; and the unveiling to the public, community boards, and other audiences of 2,881 "technically viable options for the 600 bike share stations."[32]

This assiduous outreach helped to inoculate the plan both against predictions of doom (comedian and *Daily Show* host Jon Stewart, for example, had sarcastically sketched a new business venture, his "Street Brain Material Removal Service"[33]) and against several practical complications that arose in the course

of implementation—deciding how much to charge for rides and memberships, maintaining the bikes in good repair, liability for accidents, whether to require that riders wear helmets, and. not least important, how much direction the city government should assert over the program's private management. In the glare of a harsh critique published by the city comptroller's office in 2014, and the bankruptcy of the Montreal-based company that supplied the program's bicycles and other equipment, NYC Bike Share was taken over by a consortium of investors, given a new infusion by cash by Citibank and Morgan Stanley, and put under the control of Motivate, "a unique company focused solely on operating large-scale bike share programs."[34]

By late summer 2014 Citi Bike had not solved all the problems that dogged its early days—for instance, increases in the cost of a ride and of an annual membership had slowed the growth of ridership—but it was able to report that activity since the program began had surpassed 20 million miles. In July 2015 its leaders announced plans to double the number of bikes available (from six thousand to twelve thousand) by 2017 and to add new stations in Brooklyn, Queens, and upper Manhattan; the expansion of sites, stations, bikes, and riders continued steadily thereafter.[35] By the fall of 2019 the program had become by any reasonable standard "institutionalized": riders were using 14,000 bikes at 739 active stations in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and Jersey City for 2.5 million trips (on average 80,475 per day).[36]

PARKS AND RECREATION

New York's concrete jungle is studded with parks and green spaces, large and small, that offer opportunities for walking, biking, sports, and after-school programs. Everyone loves

parks (which occupy about 14 percent of the city's land area), and "lower crime, improving park conditions, and a growing city" have encouraged ever-heavier use of them.[37] In the early 1980s Central Park welcomed about 12 million visitors but suffered roughly one thousand crimes per year. In 2017 visits had risen to 42 million and crimes had fallen to fewer than one hundred per year.[38]

The universal affection for parks, however, turns them into big green Rorschach tests that invite conflict over their character and contents. Where should they be located? Should policy emphasize the construction of new parks or the repair of older ones? What should be the relative priority and placement of, say, walkways, playgrounds, lawns, pools, pavilions, gardens, rest rooms, and benches (the latter a mixed blessing for active living aficionados given that, according to one survey, 61 percent of U.S. park-goers call themselves "sedentary").[39] And how much does size matter? Although very small parks need work "desperately," concentrating on them, said Tupper Thomas, executive director of New Yorkers for Parks, is "not a good idea." To make an impact on a community, the focus should be on "midsized parks. Having a beautiful park nearby, a place where you can meet up with friends or go for a run, is essential."[40]

The city's more prominent parks, moreover, are battlegrounds on which proponents of pedestrians and cyclists ally in the fight to limit cars. Although Transportation Alternatives has long argued for a complete ban on cars in the parks, its executive director praised as a "great leap forward" the announcement by Mayor de Blasio in 2015 that major portions of Central Park and Prospect Park would henceforth be off limits to cars on weekdays as well as weekends, thus creating "safe zones for kids to play in, for bikers, for joggers," and for others who want to "enjoy the park in peace."[41] Peace cannot be perpetual, however: parks

are also sites of skirmishes between cyclists and pedestrians over how car-free space should be apportioned between them.

The complexities inherent in making policy for parks are aggravated by governance arrangements little less diffuse than are the expectations parks evoke. To make policy—and raise money—the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) works with various nonprofit conservancies, advocacy groups, private donors, partnerships, funds, trusts, "Friends of," and alliances; with local public officials (notably borough presidents and members of the city council, who can allot discretionary funds to parks in their jurisdictions); with community groups; and with consultants, architectural and design firms, and researchers.

Public agencies other than DPR also get into the act. Parks are important to the greenness that the Department of Environmental Protection seeks to promote, may figure in the design and maintenance of housing under the control of the New York City Housing Authority, are loci of instruction and recreation for school children the Department of Education (DOE) oversees, and are—of course—"at the center of [the] active, healthy living" the DOHMH encourages.[42]

Under Mayor Bloomberg the city invested heavily in parks and park-like settings. Commissioner Adrian Benepe installed "parks in schoolyards,. . . on old industrial 'brownfields' [and] . . . on derelict railroad spurs. Just about anyplace they could find to put in a patch of green space, they did."[43] Those endeavors more than doubled the capital spent on parks over the prior ten years, according to one expert's estimate[44]—a commitment dramatically exemplified by the High Line, a park of eight acres that runs for thirty-one blocks along the west side of Manhattan. Bloomberg's DPR also collaborated with DOHMH and DOE on the interagency planning that galvanized city agencies in

support of active design guidelines and on after-school programs that incorporated physical activity.

The report *Take Care New York 2012: A Policy for a Healthier New York City*, which DOHMH issued in September 2009, promised cooperation among DOHMH, DOT, and DPR to ensure that all New Yorkers had access to "safe places near their homes where they can be physically active," including schools and parks.[45] The task force Bloomberg created to craft policies to reduce obesity recommended additions to the number of playground attendants who led Kids in Motion, a program that sponsors physical activity in playgrounds around the city.[46]

Equity claims among boroughs, neighborhoods, and income groups complicate parks policies, however. Communities that do not clamor for bike lanes may nonetheless view parkland as a welcome addition to their often limited settings for recreation and leisure, and their leaders sometimes grumble at the obstacles to acquiring such sites. In 2013, for example, city council member Fernando Cabrera of the Bronx complained not only that his borough had been ignored but also that the "participatory design process" and the city's rigid procurement rules had caused the DPR to lag in implementing projects for which he had earmarked discretionary funds.[47]

Convinced both that the active living initiatives of the Bloomberg team had centered too much on better off communities, especially in Manhattan, and that the city's poor have less access to venues for physical activity, including safe, clean, well-maintained public parks, Bill de Blasio, who succeeded Bloomberg as mayor in 2013, unveiled a generously funded Community Parks Initiative (CPI) as part of his "equity agenda."

To rewrite what de Blasio called a "tale of two cities," illustrated by Bloomberg's alleged preoccupation with urban designs that enticed tax-paying businesses and residents into the city, and

especially into Manhattan, he pledged to bring a fairer share of the good things of municipal life to lower-income, less advantaged communities in all five boroughs. Noting that the city's spending of $5.7 billion on parks over two decades had included less than $250,000 for 215 of them, de Blasio earmarked within his budget ($1.27 billion for parks in fiscal year 2015) an allocation of $130 million over four years for the rebuilding of 35 heretofore neglected parks and for targeted improvements (mainly repairs and repainting) in others.[48] The selection process would favor parks that not only had received little capital investment in past years but also were situated in communities with exceptional rates of poverty, high density, rapid growth, and strong "local partner" organizations.[49]

This Community Parks Initiative (subtitled "A Framework for an Equitable Future"), drew praise from a wide range of local leaders for a long list of reasons, among which new opportunities for active living in disadvantaged communities were prominent though (as usual) not dominant. Public advocate Letitia James praised the initiative as "instrumental in the fight against childhood obesity" and other health issues prevalent in low-income communities. "No matter their zip code," declared Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña, children "must have access to great parks, where they can exercise their bodies and minds." Assembly member Ron Kim praised the many benefits of improvements in the parks, "from fighting blight to facilitating physical activity and better health in our neighborhoods."[50]

A year later (in October 2015), de Blasio doubled the budget for the CPI to $285 million through 2019, an increase that would expand to sixty-seven the number of parks slated for reconstruction, enlarge the scope of targeted improvements to be made in other parks, and increase the ranks of personnel to maintain

parks and conduct recreation programs and fitness classes in them.[51]

Because everyone loves parks, allocation of funds to build, rebuild, and improve them triggers classic distributive strategies (i.e., log rolling) that invite credit claiming by political leaders, including ones in city hall, community boards, and advocacy organizations. And the transition from macro (park policy) to micro (the design of individual parks) is no less fraught with tradeoffs among dispersed preferences. The community consultations that the de Blasio team valued highly and advertised widely disclosed sharp differences over what the CPI money should build, buy, and fix. In Lyons Square Playground in the South Bronx, for example, desiderata included bocce, a skate park, more basketball courts, grass and flowers, a dog run, a stage, and more. As the consultant guiding the plan worked to reconcile preferences with practicality, fitness-enhancing projects were sometimes sacrificed to other priorities, sometimes emerged front and center, and sometimes got embedded within other design features. The plan for the new, improved park would—if approved by the city's Public Design Commission and then by DPR—move the basketball courts (to reduce noise that bothered residents in nearby housing), add fitness equipment for adults, install a durable Ping-Pong table, relocate playground equipment (old and new) away from asthma-inducing traffic fumes, put in a new three-hundred-foot garden walk, and add a rest room.[52]

Occasionally communities and the planners who advise them opt to make the health benefits of active living the centerpiece of their plans for the design of parks, as illustrated by the Haven project, also in the South Bronx. In this case, the creation of green spaces, recreational paths, and streetscapes along an area

of 1.3 miles was portrayed and sold to funders mainly as a route to better health. The project manager of the New York Restoration Project "kind of joke[d] that hospital systems will prescribe access to the parks," and the head of HealthxDesign, a firm that collaborated on the project, declared that her goal was "to show that the health of the area's residents can change because of design decisions."[53]

SCHOOLS

Schools, a built environment in which children spend considerable time, are of obvious strategic interest for advocates of active living. Educators can increase physical activity by teaching students about its benefits, by conducting classes that involve physical exertion, and by partnering with other institutions on projects that encourage students to exercise.

School leaders and staff may resist invitations and pressure to expand this programmatic terrain, however. Their core mission is to develop their charges' cognitive skills; grades, scores on standard exams, promotions to higher levels, and rates of admission to colleges measure their success in achieving that outcome. External demands—new measurement fads, targets set by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, and competition from charter schools, for example—increase the stress. Like health care, education is belabored by critiques that deplore "monopolies" run by "providers," and (like health care) the field is besieged by reformers itching to subject educators to market forces.[54]

Many school systems, however, enjoy considerable insulation from these slings and arrows and retain substantial discretion in tackling their tasks and allocating their time and money. Although they are formally accountable to state (and the federal)

departments of education and informally to parents (individually and represented by organizations such as Parent Teachers Associations), in many communities (including Albuquerque and Sacramento) school boards, superintendents, principals, and teachers (who are sometimes tenured or unionized, or both) have been put beyond the direct control of general-purpose government and therefore occupy an institutional world separate from that of city hall. Needless to say, this structural gulf complicates plans to introduce changes from outside (or, indeed, from within) school systems.

New York City is by no means devoid of education professionals who yearn to practice their own brand of politics in benign isolation from policy currents in and around city hall, but their ability to do so diminished dramatically in 2002 when the state government acceded to one of the two top legislative priorities of newly elected Michael Bloomberg and put the city's schools under mayoral authority. (Bloomberg's other top priority was a ban on smoking.[55]) School leaders, willy-nilly—in a local governmental regime that highly valued both health-promoting interventions and interagency cooperation, and in a civic culture replete with nonprofit and private actors who were determined to influence education policy—took a fresh look at the place of physical education in their curricula.

To be sure these leaders did not work on a tabula rasa. Education Law 803 of the state of New York, interpreted in extensive rules issued by the Board of Regents and the state commissioner of education, specifies how much physical education schools must supply to their students (at least "120 minutes per calendar week exclusive of any time that may be required for dressing and showering"), how many credits for physical education students must accrue in order to graduate, and whether recess counts toward the requirements ("No").[56] And although

the federal government prefers to encourage physical activity in schools by means of grants, not requirements, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 instructs school districts with federally funded school lunch programs to develop policies to promote healthy eating and physical activity. To manage these state and federal requirements and the multiplying demands of a range of local actors, the DOE created an Office of School Wellness Programs, which oversees a sizable portfolio of school-based fitness programs, including a "health-related fitness curriculum," a standardized tool with which to assess the physical fitness of students ("FITNESSGRAM"), and a special program of physical activities for middle schoolers.[57]

Moreover, the city is richly endowed with institutions—private, nonprofit, and public—eager to increase the prominence of physical activity in the daily lives of school children. For example, in 2014 Nike, a maker of running shoes headquartered in Oregon, gave the city's Fund for Public Schools a grant of $1 million, which the fund would make available to the DOE for augmented physical education. And two national nonprofit organizations, School Wellness Councils and Walking School Bus, offered technical assistance on how the city might expand its stock of fitness-enhancing projects.

Within the public sector, DOE got technical assistance from DOHMH for the Move-to-Improve program, which trains teachers of kindergarten through third grade in "strategies for integrating activity into daily classroom schedules."[58] The educators collaborated with DOHMH on the Bike to School and We're Walking Here initiatives and on the federally and state-funded Safe Routes to School program (which Transportation Alternatives had long energetically promoted). DOE joined with the DPR to run Shape Up, which offers free drop-in fitness classes ("aerobics, yoga, Pilates, Zumba, and much more") in all

five boroughs.[59] And, should the School Construction Authority (which the state created independently of the DOE in 1988 to reduce the risk of corruption in expensive school building projects) want to embrace active design features in its work, the city's Department of Design and Construction has at the ready guidelines that endorse, among other things, gymnatoriums—a "flex space" that usually offers "retractable and bleacher seating that enables the space to be used for . . . athletic events or as a performance and assembly space" and is therefore an asset for schools that lack room for both a gym and an auditorium.[60]

Making these marginal undertakings more prominent in the mission and mindset of DOE, an agency facing continual and intensifying scrutiny of its performance on an ever-expanding range of criteria that have little or nothing to do with fitness per se, is an arduous organizational stretch, however. How successfully the formidable list of interventions contributed to the outcomes everyone envisioned—a satisfactory supply of well-taught, well-equipped classes and activities that improve the fitness—hence, the health—of New York's public-school students in grades K–12—remains in dispute.

One study reported impressive progress in eliminating the negative—namely, a reduction of 44 percent in injuries to children in New York City whose schools participated in the SRS program—whereas census tracts with schools without SRS showed no decline.[61] Accentuating the positive proved to be harder, however. Advocates eager to apply active design guidelines in the schools sometimes met delays at the hands of community boards, the School Construction Authority, district leaders, and parent associations.[62] And a report by the city comptroller's office in 2015 contended that nearly one-third (32 percent) of the city's public schools lacked a full-time certified gym teacher and that 28 percent had no indoor space for

physical exercise.[63] The critique was quickly taken up by the Citizens Committee for Children and the Women's City Club of New York (two prominent voluntary voices among the city's densely populated chorus of reformers and watchdogs), which seconded the comptroller's demand that the DOE "immediately conduct a system-wide assessment of physical education in these schools," which were disproportionally found in East Harlem, the South Bronx, and other disadvantaged areas.

The politics of active living policy in New York present a paradox: under mayors Bloomberg and de Blasio the city developed an assortment of active living programs that are impressive in their variety and scope (all the more so because noteworthy changes in the built environment were not eclipsed by the familiar strategic default option—namely, seeking to boost demand for activity within the status quo)—but at no time did active living as a distinct priority stand as a foremost priority on the agendas of any of the top political and institutional leaders under whose authority these initiatives took shape. Tom Farley's account of the aggressive, innovative interventions of the DOHMH under Bloomberg, for example, makes much of campaigns against smoking, trans fats, salt, and surgery drinks while promotion of physical activity gets barely a passing glance (the main references to the health benefits of exercise in Farley's book appear on pages 43, 134, 154, 185, 256, and 258). Nor did active living stand high on the agenda of Bloomberg's successor, Bill de Blasio, in whose state of the city address early in 2019 health issues (and, a fortiori, active living) took a back seat to workplace protections, housing, improvements in the subway system, and free early education.[64] The famous Kingdonian confluence of problem, policy, and political streams did not elevate active living above (so to

speak) the middle rungs of the municipal agenda, so what subtler, subterranean forces propelled these muted priorities into policy? Unraveling the paradox requires attention to the politics by which enabling contexts created entrepreneurial niches for innovation.

In New York under the Bloomberg and de Blasio administrations several interlocking, mutually reinforcing contexts enabled and energized policies to promote active living. First, the city's prominence within the ranks of "world" and "global" cities induced within its leaders curiosity about the range of policies pursued both by peers such as London and Paris and by smaller but highly instructive cities such as Amsterdam and Copenhagen, which strive to honor New Urbanism, smart growth, sustainability, greenness, clean air, and—somewhere in the middle of the list—active living. Second, mayoral determination to make measurable improvements in the health of the city's population created space for active living among many other health-promoting strategies on the municipal agenda and kept alive the possibility that entrepreneurs within DOHMH might make manifest its latent appeals.

Third, a strong, media-savvy advocacy group, Transportation Alternatives, which represents both pedestrians and cyclists, elevated walking and biking amid the city's myriad priorities and found potent allies in organizations such as Families for Safe Streets. Fourth, the city's DOHMH had sufficient size and organizational sophistication to nourish a mix of activities aimed at promoting healthy behavior, including active living, which benefited from the entrepreneurial energies of an assistant commissioner, who in turn institutionalized active living initiatives by hiring a full-time specialist and then by building the city's first public-health oriented built-environment team to advance these initiatives.

Fifth, top-level atmospheric support (from the mayors' office on down) for health-promoting policies and projects encouraged managerial and interagency cooperation, which served to launch and secure those endeavors in and across a range of city agencies.[65] Strong high-level encouragement meant that failure to cooperate had palpable organizational consequences, and DOHMH, DOT, DPR, DDC, and DOE became, and have been encouraged to remain, collaborative sponsors of pedestrian-friendly building designs and plazas, traffic-calming measures, bike lanes, bike sharing, safe routes to school, and new opportunities for physical activity in the city's parks and schools. Against a priori expectation, these "priorities" moved from the margins of policy to institutionalization.