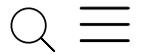




Press Release



The City, Elected Officials, and Community Officials Rename Willoughby Square as Abolitionist Place

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Willoughby Square north east view. Rendering: Hargreaves Jones

The City Will Invest \$15 Million to Construct the 1.15-Acre Abolitionist Place

BROOKLYN, NY—New York City Economic Development Corporation today announced the City will allocate \$15 million to construct 1.15 acres of street-level, public open space at Wiloughby Square in Downtown Brooklyn. Additionally, city

officials announced they would permanently rename the site Abolitionist Place after approval from Brooklyn Community Board 2.

The 1.15 acre site will bring green space and community amenities to Downtown Brooklyn, further enhancing the growing commercial, residential, and cultural hub. Designed by renowned landscape architecture firm Hargreaves Jones, plans include a new play area, lawn space, dog park, lush ornamental plantings, and multiple seating areas.

“We are proud to join the NYC Economic Development Corporation in honoring those who fought to abolish slavery and who have been key to furthering equity citywide,” said **Senior Advisor for Recovery Lorraine Grillo**. “The City’s investment in Abolitionist Place further demonstrates our commitment to all communities as we continue our work with partners to build a recovery that works for all of us.”

“We are so pleased to officially rename this site as Abolitionist Place, honoring the legacy of the many men and women of this area who fought to abolish slavery and make meaningful social reform for generations to come,” said **NYCEDC President and CEO Rachel Loeb**. “When complete this will be a wonderful, open gathering space for Downtown Brooklyn that will enrich the lives of those living in this community. Congratulations to all the community members and everyone else who worked to bring this together, including our partners at DCLA.”

“The unveiling of “Abolitionist Place” is the culmination of a nearly two-decade promise to those living in Downtown Brooklyn,” said **Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams**. “This much-needed open fulfills longstanding promises from EDC to community advocates and residents, and I thank EDC and the advocates for their efforts to ensure that the promises made were kept--and kept in a way that honors our collective past.”

“I am proud of the work we have done to get here, that of all those who have organized and of Community Board 2 to aptly name the open space Abolitionist Place, also the co-name for Duffield Street - and on which 227 Duffield Street was recently landmarked after years of advocacy,” said **Councilmember Stephen Levin**. “It is imperative that we honor our abolitionist history, of which Brooklyn - Brooklyn Heights

and Downtown Brooklyn in the 33rd Council District especially - is rich with. This is also timely as we prepare to honor and celebrate Juneteenth and only fitting that we have a living memorial with the open space our community needs and deserves.”

“I am thrilled to be part of this momentous occasion, celebrating the development of Abolitionist Place here in Downtown Brooklyn,” said **New York City Council Majority Leader Laurie A. Cumbo**. “I would like to thank the NYCEDC, DCLA, and DBP, for their partnership and commitment on this project. I’m glad to see that New York City is recognizing and honoring those who participated in our local abolitionist history.”

“It’s so important to celebrate and preserve the history of Brooklyn and the borough’s 19th century abolitionist movement heritage with open space that underscores freedom,” said **Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon**. “I applaud the inspirational work of so many people determined that our anti-slavery history should live on as an important testament. Thanks to the Brooklyn Historical Society, Weeksville Heritage Center, and Irondale Ensemble Project, as well as all involved in the creation of Abolitionist Place.”

“Naming this open space Abolitionist Place puts an indelible stamp on Downtown Brooklyn as an important stop on the Underground Railroad,” said **Brooklyn Community Board 2 Chair Lenue Singletary**. “Abolitionist Place preserves the legacy of persons such as Ida B. Wells, Susan Smith McKinney and of course, the most famous “conductor” of the Railroad, Harriet Tubman. It honors all anti-slavery activists who put their livelihoods and lives in danger to provide safety for the enslaved persons seeking freedom in the Northern states and Canada.”

“Today’s announcement brings us one step closer to creating this long-awaited public square in the heart of Downtown Brooklyn that will not only provide much-needed space for the community but also shine a light on the area’s significance in abolitionist history,” said **Downtown Brooklyn Partnership President Regina Myer**. “Thanks to Brooklyn Community Board 2 for naming the site Abolitionists Place, and to the City for committing to permanent public art that will honor those who fought for freedom here in Downtown Brooklyn.”

“The MoCADA Staff, board, and I are absolutely excited about the honoring of local Black history in the naming of the new dedicated open space, Abolitionist Place,” said **MoCADA Executive Director Amy Andrieux**. “We hope that this communal square will prove to be a safe space to convene, celebrate art, uplift disenfranchised voices, and welcome both native residents and newcomers alike under the banner of shared values and liberation for all.”

“Irondale and our collaborators at Weeksville, and The Brooklyn Historical Society, were extremely proud to play a part in helping to uncover the rich but untold story of the Brooklyn abolitionists,” said **Co-Founder of Irondale Terry Greiss**. “These were extraordinary women and men who rose to the challenge of their age and did extraordinary things that literally moved the arc of history a little closer to justice. *Color Between the Lines*, the play we created from those stories remains as relevant now as it was when we first created the In Pursuit of Freedom project.”

Planning for the development of Abolitionist Place has been underway since NYCEDC facilitated a community design process with residents, stakeholders, elected officials and City agencies. The project is part of the Downtown Brooklyn Redevelopment Plan, a set of open space and infrastructure commitments made in 2004 to reinvigorate the neighborhood and celebrate the area’s unique heritage.

In partnership with the DCLA’s Percent for Art program, NYCEDC has selected an artist, Kameelah Janan Rasheed, to design a public art piece to commemorate the abolitionist movement with a focus on the area’s ties to the Underground Railroad, and the contemporary importance of this legacy. Rasheed’s proposal – “Questions Worth Having Answers To” – is in design and will integrate a broad range of community feedback being collected, starting this summer. This builds on the work of “In Pursuit of Freedom,” a multifaceted public history initiative led by the Brooklyn Historical Society (now Center for Brooklyn History at Brooklyn Public Library), Weeksville Heritage Center, and Irondale Ensemble Project that explores the everyday heroes of Brooklyn’s anti-slavery movement.

“We applaud the naming of this public space to reflect the historical fight for Black freedom that was centered here,” said **Percent for Art Director Kendal Henry**. “As a

culminating achievement of the In Pursuit of Freedom project, Rasheed’s public artwork planned for Abolitionist Place will commemorate the vital history of abolition in the Downtown Brooklyn community, while also fostering collaboration among residents to reflect on the contemporary resonance of these themes and recognition of the work we still have ahead of us that builds on this important legacy.”

“Abolitionist Place is an important site that commemorates the lives and work of those who diligently fought for freedom and justice in the most dire of conditions,” said **President and CEO of Weeksville Heritage Center Dr. Raymond Codrington**. “It serves as an enduring reminder that resistance and resilience have always been central to the African American experience”

About NYCEDC

New York City Economic Development Corporation is a mission-driven, non-profit organization that creates shared prosperity across New York City by strengthening neighborhoods and growing good jobs. NYCEDC works with and for communities to provide them with the resources they need to thrive, and invests in projects that increase sustainability, support job growth, develop talent, and spark innovation to strengthen the City’s competitive advantage. To learn more about our work and initiatives, please visit us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#).

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