

Jane Jacobs Square

Massengale & Co LLC • Dover, Kohl & Partners



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DIFFERENT GRIDS come together in the block of Bleecker Street between West 10th and Christopher Streets, shaping an interesting space dominated by the cars that speed down Bleecker. Jacobs Square reclaims it for pedestrians and cyclists, in the process making the first true “shared space” in New York City, shared by vehicles, bikes and pedestrians all at once.

The Greenwich Village grids precede the Commissioners’ 1811 grid. The intersection of Bleecker and Christopher Streets marks one of the original centers of the old village, where a public well once stood. The space is still one of the centers of Village life, but our Google Street View shows ugly highway-scale stripings on the street and narrow sidewalks. Anyone who walks through the space sees that it has the potential to be one of the great public places in New York, if the 1960-style, auto-dominated design is taken away.

Our design uses principles of place-making to create a place shared by walkers, cyclists, drivers and diners:

- We expand the sidewalk on the east side of the square to the west, forming a triangular “attached plaza” that covers the majority of the square.
- The roadbed, now parallel to the buildings on the west side of the square, is reduced to a narrow traffic lane and a lane for parking and loading for the stores on the square.
- A “speed table” on the south side of West 10th Street raises the roadbed to the level of the sidewalks and the rest of the plaza.
- Trees along the sides of the road act like bollards, defining the boundaries of the street.

- A fountain on the north side of Christopher Street reduces ambient noise and recalls the 18th century well once on the site.
- Bleecker Street no longer goes straight through: cars either stop and then turn right on Christopher Street, or stop at Christopher before turning left. In that scenario, Christopher changes to two way or one way eastbound.
- A monument to the Commissioners’ Plan of 1811 on the blank wall of the building on the southwest corner of Christopher and Bleecker Streets visually terminates the view down Bleecker, while the fountain on axis with the southern leg of Bleecker points to the continuation of the street.
- Tables and chairs in the square along with the new shade trees and programmed uses encourage people to use the space.

Some of the tables and chairs would be like those used in Bryant Park and by the New York City DOT in outdoor spaces—chairs the public can easily rearrange. Two parts of the square would be reserved for a restaurant and a cafe, each with outdoor service.

Cars passing by would be tamed by the speed table, the narrow roadbed, the trees bordering the road, the cars and trucks entering and leaving from the short-term parking spaces, and – most importantly – by the shared space roadbed, shared by cars, trucks, cyclists and walkers.

New Yorkers are ready for spaces like the new Jacobs Square. We have small apartments and live in public space. We need more outdoor spaces that aren’t dominated by cars.

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ABOVE: Looking south on Blecker Street between West 10th and Christopher Streets, showing the highway-scale graphics and striping that dominate the otherwise intimately scaled space (Google Street Views)

RIGHT: Bird's eye perspective, looking south on Blecker Street from above West 10th Street. This before view is taken from the same vantage point as the drawing of our design for Jacobs Square

