**Title:** The Cultural Revitalization of MidWest Manhattan Through the Locus of the Arts at Penn Station

**Abstract:**

With the introduction of the Fourth Regional Plan of New York City, New York and the more recent research by Grimshaw Architects in collaboration with CityLab, Midwest Manhattan is encouraged to be redeveloped under the lens of sustainability, equity, health and prosperity. These conducted research shows that the area is increasingly taking an interest in cultural venues. The implementation of a cultural capital alongside economic factors enhanced by architectural design play a key role in revitalizing Midwest Manhattan and helping tie the urban fabric.

Our findings, relying on research and site visits, show that in order for the community to prosper, an urban approach with cultural venues, shared streets, sustainable means of travel and public spaces. Hence, our design *Locus of Arts at Penn Station* has addressed all these issues through the *Locus of Arts at Penn Station*, which has incorporated these and includes two cultural towers connected by a green plaza and suspended commercial bridge and which are composite of galleries, film venues, operable performance spaces, fashion venues and educational spaces. In our findings we foresee potential economic growth and social prosperity in Midwest Manhattan through the revenue generation sourcing from leasable office space, air rights, movie theatres, operable venues, commercial, public and art spaces.

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1 Locus of Arts at Penn Station was designed during the Term of Fall 2019 in full collaboration with Courtney Hannah. All drawings and work shown is also in collaboration with her.
Assessment of Current Conditions

With the introduction of the Fourth Regional Plan in 2017\(^2\) by the Regional plan association of NYC, the development and design of Penn Station, the expansion of Moynihan Station and the re-location of Madison Square Garden\(^3\), Midwest Manhattan is being reconfigured with an emphasis on equity, health, prosperity and sustainability\(^4\) (refer to fig. 1). Grimshaw and CityLab\(^5\) conducted an urban scale inventory of the existing multi-use of the district in a large scale and located cultural venues including media, manufacturing, design services, educational facilities, performance and visual arts and public spaces. (refer to fig. 2) The implementation of a cultural capital alongside economic factors enhanced by architectural design play a key role in revitalizing Midwest Manhattan and helping tie the urban fabric. In response, *Locus of the Art at Penn* incorporates this research into a proposal addressing issues of transportation, culture and sustainability through a proposed cultural venue block project that with its sectional shift of formal and informal venues along Mid-West Manhattan. Located at 320 West 31\(^{st}\) street, *Locus of the Art at Penn* encourages an urban approach with full consideration of the context and previous made research. (refer to fig. 3)

Although various cultural venues are present in the area, the district lacks a cohesive cultural identity that helps tie the urban fabric together. These cultural venues range from media, manufacturing, design services, educational facilities, performance and visual arts and public


spaces⁶ lay in the considered area extending from the High Line (12th avenue) in the West, 5th Avenue in the East and W34th Street North, West 26th South and although very dynamic it is in need of a larger and more inclusive urban plan and a proposed block design that ties the urban pattern of the district together. Among the most important are Madison Square Garden (located on 4th Pennsylvania Plaza, New York, NY 10001), The Cultural Shed (located at 545 West 30th) and the High Line (located between 10th and 11th Avenue). Madison Square Garden however, is due to move and H3 Hardy Collaboration Architecture⁷ has proposed to move the facility on the waterfront, west of 11th Avenue, the High Line and The Cultural Shed⁸, offering a linear urban connection between all most important cultural venues. Yet, the connection is informal and requires a hub and attractor that helps tie these cultural venues together. “When cultural agencies do not consciously and actively incorporate communities and their needs into cultural development, their policies and programs can in fact conflict with and threaten the cultural health of urban neighborhoods. Ultimately, this will undermine a city’s cultural vitality and undercut its ability to appeal to the developers, tourists, creative-sector businesses, and educated workforce that cultural development means to attract.”⁹ “Cities around the world are building and branding urban cultural life as a way to develop local economies and revitalize urban centers.”¹⁰ Hence, we have designed a strategic urban plan along with a focal development area titled Locus of the Arts at Penn Station. Both of these designs help tie the urban pattern together and enhance the economic and community gain through cultural venues, transport connection, public and green spaces.

⁶ Ibid.
¹⁰ Ibid.
Figure 1: RPA, Fourth Regional Plan Values, Crossing the Hudson How to Increase Transit Capacity and Improve Commutes, August 2017.

Fig. 2: The Alliance for a New Penn Station, Untitled, Beyond Madison Square Garden: the Future of West Midtown, October 2014.

Fig. 3: Kaskaviqi & Hannah, Objects of Interest and Suggested Urban Approach Diagram, 2019
The fourth regional plan concentrates on transportation through the completion of Moynihan Station, expansion of Penn Station to the South and the creation of an extended gateway from Hudson River to the East River Tunnels, (refer to fig. 4) all transportation issues which *Locus of the Arts at Penn Station* addresses. The completion and extension of Moynihan Station is addressed through underground transportation connection points extending from West 31\textsuperscript{st} to West 30\textsuperscript{th} Street into the new Station. These underground channels of *The Locus of Arts at Penn Station* connect informal performance venues with the subway access in Moynihan Station at 15’ – 30’ below street access. We thought it was critical to activate the underground passageway networks for the newly expanded Penn terminal with light and culture. Hence, the underground connection of the *Locus of Arts at Penn Station* and Moynihan Station is detailed with informal underground performance spaces and skylights that help directionality and use. These skylights are a present element from the Highline to West 30\textsuperscript{th} Street. In doing so, our urban approach is encouraging the future presence of other underground venues that tie the urban fabric together from the new Penn Station on the waterfront to Penn Station, resulting in a transportation gateway that connects the Hudson River with the East River Tunnels. (refer to fig. 5)

We also took advantage of the planned reprogramming of the district to create new public spaces through suggesting the further development of West 31\textsuperscript{st} street as a shared one. For example, there are plans to move the United States Postal Office located on West 30\textsuperscript{th} street\textsuperscript{11}, due to the change in planning, rent costs and nature of the district. As a result, the need for service vehicles will substantially drop, allowing for more shared streets where pedestrians and the design of public

spaces can start to emerge. *The Locus of the Arts at Penn Station* addresses these public spaces and informal venues through the design of an open amphitheaters in a green plaza, as well as green access routes in the underground informal venues lit up by skylights. Relying on the objectives and goals of the Fourth Regional Plan, *The Locus of the Arts at Penn Station* foresees the addressing of sustainability, equity, health and prosperity through the design of informal venues, transportation connection points, skylights and green and public spaces. (refer to fig. 6, 7 &8).

Fig. 4: Regional Plan Association, Phase 3, Crossing the Hudson: How to Increase Transit Capacity and Improve Commutes, 2017.

Fig. 5: Kaskaviqi & Hannah, Site Plan, 2019
Fig. 6: Kaskaviqi & Hannah, Urban Approach Diagrams, 2019
Fig. 7: SOM, Untitled, Moynihan Train Hall, 2017

Fig. 8: Kaskaviqi & Hannah, Moynihan Station and Subway Access, 2019
The Locus of The Arts at Penn Station in Aid of the Cultural Venues in Context

In the local scale, Locus of the Arts at Penn Station addresses mixed use, public space, performance venues, civic engagement, commerce, culture and education, through its relationship to context (refer to fig. 9). This was accomplished in our proposal by introducing a sectional shift in the urban block which allowed us to programmatically connect formal and informal venues along different heights within the block. Programmatically, as an urban device, the sectional shift also helped the activation of the street front through its accessibility of underground venues simultaneously with transportation connections in the two underground floors extending 30 feet under the street level (refer to fig. 10, 11 & 12). Pedestrians are encouraged to access the informal venues through the green pathways and spectator stops in the journey to connect to Moynihan Station. The street level is a composite Plaza with two main towers, each addressing cultural venues differently: one through leasable space and moving venues and the other through a more educational approach. The first tower extending to 100 floors and more than 1,307,300, is characterized by its main lobby being split in two stories: the underground and the ground floor. The ground floor is an open plan with street access from a panoramic elevator that allows views through all Manhattan, including the Empire State building. The other street access is characterized by a cantilevered operable gallery which opens up to an operable performance venue. Sectionally, the first tower keeping the edge towards Penn Station shifts from an underground film venue, designed to host events during the New York Film Festival, to informal performance venues open to everyone in the public and with three different access points, to the lobby of the building, to the operable venue space and gallery to a fashion venue and leasable space (insert square footage and floors). This sectional view is framed from the outdoor informal theatre in the plaza, where the façade of the first tower allows a perfect transparency where the operable venue opens to the main gallery, making every form of
This operable venue addresses issues of sound systems and seating areas that adjust to the use of the space with a seating capacity up to 1,200 making it the focal point of Locus of the Arts at Penn due to its addressing of equity and efficiency making it both sustainable and prosperous (refer to fig. 13). Financially, the Locus at Penn Station aims to generate funds from the available leasable and office space (1,137,351 sqf), air rights and commercial use of the formal venues or the suspended bridge (7000 sqf).
**Fig. 9:** Kaskaviqi & Hannah, Aerial View of Locus of the Arts at Penn Station and its context, 2019

**Fig. 10:** Kaskaviqi & Hannah, Macro Scale Sectional Shift of the Locus of the Arts at Penn Station, 2019
Fig. 11: Kaskaviqi & Hannah, Sectional Shift of Cultural Venues at the Locus of the Arts at Penn Station, 2019

Fig. 12: Kaskaviqi & Hannah, Sectional Perspective Shift of Cultural Venues at the Locus of the Arts at Penn Station, 2019
Fig. 13: Kaskaviq & Hannah, Movement of the Main Venue at the Locus of the Arts at Penn Station Diagrams, 2019
Details in enhancing and aiding the context

We concluded that in order to offer a visual and itinerary connection between the two towers and the Moynihan Station, our design would benefit from a commercial bridge which overlooks the Plaza and connects the two towers together. The commercial bridge allows for a 180-degree view towards Moynihan Station, Penn Station, and *the Locus of Arts at Penn Station* Plaza, framing the importance and the accessibility of different types of transportation and public events. The commercial bridge connects Tower 1 to Tower 2 in their respective 2nd and 3rd floor allowing for the two venues that occupy each story to programmatically connect through a directed path. The bridge also offers connection to an open patio overlooking the public plaza and informal avenues. The second tower, connected to the first one through the bridge, opens to the green plaza and the informal amphitheater in the street level, and has transportation access points through its ground floor lobby.

Sectionally, the second Penn Tower extends to only 11 stories above street level and two below. The 11 stories (144,768 sqf) are composite of educational facilities for the arts, digital fabrication and galleries, all at a height typical for the building code of the area and the surrounding buildings’ height. The underground floors are open to the public and allow for the leasing of informal performance venues. The latter is a potential to address the needs of the area for office space and art studios, all while maintaining the profile of a mixed use and cultural facility. Based on the need of integrating low-income housing, the design foresees these leasable spaces to follow accordingly due to their square footage and use.

- **Cultural Venues and Their Relationship to the Research**
  Although the two towers of *the Locus of the Arts at Penn Station* have a direct connection through the suspended commercial bridge, what helps tie the urban fabric and the itinerary of both towers...
together is the plaza, located in between *Locus of the Arts 1* and *Locus of the Arts 2*. The plaza is made of green spaces, skylights to the underground informal venues and transportation access, direct access to a shared street with bike lines and with an immediate connection to the high line, an informal amphitheater and stage and green walkways that lead to underground venues and access to Penn Station and Moynihan Station. This plaza is the heart of the *Locus of Arts at Penn Station* due to its consideration of all values of the Fourth Regional Plan: sustainability, equity, health and prosperity\(^\text{12}\) (refer to fig. 15). Sustainability is addressed through the shared street, skylights, green spaces and different transport accessibility all of which also feed into the value of health and equity. The public spaces and welcoming performance venues for the culturally diverse community of Midwest Manhattan, are designed to enhance the attributes of the people and their social gathering making the suggested design one that encourages prosperity of the identity of the New York Community (refer to fig.14).

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*Fig. 14: Kaskaviqi & Hannah, Street View of the Locus of the Arts at Penn Station Diagrams, 2019*
Fig. 15: Kaskaviqi & Hannah, Floor Plans of the Locus of the Arts at Penn Station Diagrams, 2019
Conclusion of The Research

*Locus of the Arts at Penn Station* engages the needs of the district as identified in the Fourth Regional Plan and the vision of the future of the district. “The economic health of the entire region and its residents depends on how our current leaders react to this crisis and plan for the future.”

In addition to their research with Grimshaw Architects, CityLab’s research suggests that “the effects of these types of cultural capital on both median income, house prices, and composite indexes of urban development in London’s 33 boroughs and 60 of New York’s 71 community districts over the period 2007 to 2014, which spans the Great Recession and its recovery. The overarching takeaway is that culture or cultural capital plays a key role, operating alongside more traditional economic factors, in shaping urban development.”

This data not only suggests that Midwest Manhattan is slowly developing into a cultural Hub, especially due to its determinant points of identification (Madison Square Garden on Water, The Shed, The High Line and other smaller venues), but also that the design of the district is in need of a factor that helps tying the urban fabric together. “Jane Jacobs’ path-breaking conception of healthy cities as vital places where streets, parks, neighborhoods, and downtowns are used by diverse populations for mixed purposes in daytime and at night”. *Locus of the Arts at Penn Station* does so by addressing financial, social, cultural and urban planning.

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13 Ibid.
References:


