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Gateways to Change, RFQ Submission

Dear Sarah Hope,

I am thrilled to present a proposal for the Hanover Street Design Competition, drawing inspiration from my experiences as a Black female designer born in Baltimore, Maryland. The “Neighborhood Nooks” proposal is grounded in promoting community-driven solutions, addressing historical inequalities, and challenging societal perceptions. Its aim is to enrich urban living by creating refuges for play and gathering within neighborhoods.

My diverse background, spanning roles as a researcher, designer, and resident in Baltimore, PG County, NYC, Philadelphia, and New Orleans, has cultivated my commitment to community-driven interventions. My involvement in neighborhood revitalization and urban playscapes in Philadelphia has demonstrated my ability to translate community needs into impactful design solutions. My background in architecture and environmental research, combined with hands-on experience in carpentry, neighborhood revitalization, and narrative placemaking, uniquely positions me for this personally resonant project. Acknowledging the rich yet overlooked history of the neighborhood, I envision parklet-style spaces seamlessly integrating historical narratives into the urban fabric. These spaces, tailored to the human scale, address environmental stressors and serve as community-driven projects—crafted, maintained, and expanded by the residents themselves.

Similar to other cities I’ve worked in, Brooklyn’s history reflects urban challenges like red-lining, historical disinvestment, and racial conflicts. This proposal aims to extract the unique imprint of local pride, resilience, and reconnection, shifting the perception that structurally neglected communities, like Brooklyn, are labeled criminal and therefore unworthy of care. This approach presents a unique opportunity to reclaim urban spaces by and for community members, providing a space for refuge and engagement. Beyond aesthetics and activation, the proposal aspires to address public safety and shed light on historical environmental injustices impacting mental and physical health. In testament to Brooklyn’s rich historical origins, the project will draw stories from multi-generational legacies to provide a tangible platform for community members to redefine their neighborhood narrative.

The ‘Neighborhood Nooks’ concept embodies modular designs for seating, play structures, and planters with native vegetation, ensuring cost-effectiveness, easy replication, and adaptability for each site. Crafted to mitigate noise, improve air quality, and regulate heat, these units also promote sustainability through the use of recycled materials like pallets. Guided by community engagement, each design envisions a community-driven project—dreamt, designed, built, and maintained by the very residents it serves. The Nooks themselves are visually bound by murals created by local artists drawing inspiration from collected and historical narratives. The ultimate objective extends beyond the transformation of spaces; it empowers residents to shape and enhance their living environment. Through immersive hands-on design and build days, participants not only acquire valuable skills but become catalysts for change. This engagement component aims to transcend the confines of the project, inspiring participants to replicate the modular elements, fostering play and gathering spaces throughout the neighborhood. Tailored to meet unique needs and expressions, “Neighborhood Nooks” are a catalyst for community-building, nurturing a sense of belonging, and contributing to reconnection.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Aida

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HANOVER STREET DESIGN COMPETITION 2024