The first annual SustainaBuild Design Challenge came to a close on Thursday May 12, 2016 with presentations from our four finalist teams. This spring, the New York City Department of Design and Construction joined with Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP), and the Columbia Population Research Center (CPRC) to consider how design can affect health—a key issue in our fast-urbanizing world. The SustainaBuild Challenge coincided with the launch of the DDC’s new “Design and Construction Excellence 2.0: Guiding Principles,” which emphasizes elements of health, equity, sustainability, and resilience in design.

The teams of students presenting at this final event truly rose to the challenge. Each project included a needs assessment of existing buildings, public spaces, and community priorities, a design for a new urban feature that promotes physical and mental health of city residents, and a proposal of how they would evaluate the health impact of their innovation.

First to present were graduating GSAPP students Diego Soto and Lindsey Wikstrom, whose team Public/Park/Station focused on improving use of the space directly outside NYC’s 25th Precinct station in East Harlem to better facilitate police/resident interaction, and better neighborhood green space, community physical activity and mental health (upper left).

They were followed by Jardín de la Libertad, a project by Columbia College undergraduates Joshua Foster and Subhas Nair (upper right). Josh and Subhas proposed designing a rooftop garden at the South Bronx’s Segundo Ruiz Belvis Family Health Center to promote the health and relaxation of Bronx residents and health center patients and families.

Team People’s Toilet made their way to the stage next and was made up of an interdisciplinary mix of GSAPP and Mailman School students (lower left). Tonia Sing Chi, Brian Ho, Mathilde Puls, and Nicole Tay designed a composting public toilet and located it in Washington Heights’ Plaza de las Americas. Their innovation addressed the shortage of public restrooms in NYC as well as the environmental health impact of waste.

Mailman School first and second years Kelly Cheung, Ashley Gripper, and Adena Hernandez comprised the evening’s final team, The High Bridge (lower right). Their plan involved shaping the High Bridge, which connects Washington Heights to the Bronx, into a destination. The design featured benches, lights, art, and other features that would draw pedestrians, promote community comradery, and improve physical and mental health of residents.

Thursday’s event culminated in an announcement of the SustainaBuild Challenge’s winning team by the Department of Design and Construction Chief Architect, Margaret Castillo. After a difficult round of scoring given the excellence of all four projects, the jurors declared a tie between Public/Park/Station and The High Bridge! Congratulations teams!

(Photos Courtesy of Rick Bell, New York City Department of Design and Construction)