



# **LGBT Youth Center Pier 40 Recommendation**

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[photo credit: Super-interesting Design LLC]

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# Introduction

The redevelopment of Pier 40 represents an exciting opportunity to generate a community-centered approach to development ventures in New York. By developing Pier 40 through a community needs assessment and upholding dedication to accountability, we can take hold of this strategic opportunity and develop necessary steps in providing for the needs of the West Village community, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth.

Since August 2007, FIERCE has convened hundreds LGBT youth and nearly two dozen LGBT Service Organizations in New York to identify the current needs of LGBT Youth. We have taken these needs and the recommendations made by the Pier 40 Working Group of July 2007 and have creatively placed them in the framework of the possibilities for uses on Pier 40.

In this document you will find a brief overview of some of the issues LGBT youth are facing, some challenges in finding relevant programming for LGBT youth, and its relevance to the West Village and Hudson River Park generally. We have created a visionary recommendation that speaks to the uses identified by LGBT youth through a comprehensive needs assessment. In this document, we will provide an overview of the possibilities for community uses on Pier 40 that provide for the needs of LGBT youth.

“The Village is a place where LGBT youth can form friendships and bonds and be themselves with less chance of danger; However, the Piers aren't much of a welcoming place during the colder seasons of the year. The LGBT youth who have long contributed to the culture of the Village for decades deserve a place where they can come to all year-round in order to face be safe from encountering hateful violence in their own neighborhoods.” - **X, LGBT Youth Age 22**

## Why LGBT youth Services on Pier 40?

The West Village and the Christopher Street Pier (Pier 45) have been a historic safe<sup>1</sup> space for the LGBT community. For over 30 years, low-income LGBT youth have called Pier 45 and the West Village home. Many youth have testified that the Pier was the only place where they could go to be openly LGBT without the fear of violence they often faced in their schools, homes, and workplaces.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'safe' is used throughout this document and refers to the holistic environment in which LGBT youth access services that respect their identities, gender performance, and varied experiences. A 'safe' space generates overall respect for everyone's identity and does not present the threat of physically, emotional, or institutional abuse and violence. On the contrary, a space that is unsafe carries the possibility of physical, emotional, and verbal violence. Additionally, this would include spaces or services that are not relevant to the experiences of LGBT youth [e.x. medical services that don't respect the gender identify and sexuality of LGBT youth clients and provide services and counseling that do not incorporate the client's lived experience as non-conforming to gender norms.

Unfortunately, many trans-identified people are left unsupported by inadequate medical services that are insensitive to their experiences-to name one example of many. Ultimately, these realities are exacerbated by increasingly limited access to safe public space.

These resources are especially significant given that an increasing number of LGBT youth are coming out at earlier ages only to find themselves homeless or marginally housed. A 2007 data analysis of homeless youth nation-wide suggests that 20 to 40 percent of homeless youth are LGBT identified<sup>2</sup>. In New York City, however, our rate of homeless LGBT youth is around 40%. More often than not, the services that LGBT youth are able to access are often times insensitive to their personal gender expression and sexuality, are abusive, and closed during the hours that they are most needed-late in the evenings.

Pier 40 can and should be developed with the quality and safety of the West Village community as the priority. This means creating a space for community uses like dog parks, art space, schools, and space for LGBT youth services that are desperately needed. In the past few years, the West Village community, including LGBT youth, residents, business owners, and the Hudson River Park Trust, have built momentum around trying to explore ways to collaboratively address the issues LGBT youth are facing. Re-building Pier 40 with a commitment to services for LGBT youth means creating solutions that do not rely on pushing people out of the West Village or the Piers, but embraces everyone's right to access safe public space.

## **The Recommendations by Pier 40 Working Group**

In June 2007, the Pier 40 Working Group appointed by the Hudson River Park Trust Advisory Council made recommendations for the development of Pier 40 based upon responses from the community and reflection on the proposals submitted through the request for proposal application<sup>3</sup>. The major recommendations from the community that lay the foundation for our visionary recommendation are:

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1. *The Working Group believes, given the income from current uses at Pier 40, and the vast unused spaces on Pier 40, that it is possible to expand both the recreational spaces and income-generating uses, and provide more park space and increased revenue, **without large-scale private***

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<sup>2</sup> Ray, N. (2006). Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth: An epidemic of homelessness. New York: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and the National Coalition for the Homeless. Retrieved January 10, 2008 from <http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/HomelessYouth.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hudsonriverpark.org/pdfs/development/Pier40/WorkGroup07.25.07.pdf>

**development.** This can be done under the management of Trust staff, which as already demonstrated, in building the rest of Hudson River Park, a capability to undertake such development and generate income from park-compatible uses. ...**Incremental development will allow flexibility in meeting the community's changing needs and in shaping the potential of the Pier.** (page 5)

2. ...the Working Group has worked with the community to clearly enunciate certain basic needs that ought to be recognized and addressed in the eventual development of Pier 40. At a minimum, future development should meet the following programmatic and use principles:

...Section 2g. Development should result in the creation of at least 150,000 square feet of low-cost space for locally based arts and culture, including dance and theater, so that Pier 40 can become a center for public performance, and a studio space for artists. **Such space should also house LGBTQ services that are badly needed on the nearby waterfront. These uses should not be chosen by a developer but by a public process.** (page 7)

These recommendations made by the Pier 40 Working Group have been inspiring for a process of community-centered development. This recommendation is based upon the principles of community-led development and a deep-seeded commitment to collaboration and dialogue amongst LGBT youth, West Village residents, West Village business owners, and LGBT service organizations.

Fundamentally, we acknowledge that community-developed and supported uses on Pier 40 can be successful and that success cannot be replicated by private development which prioritizes profit over people. In this vein, we are excited to help facilitate and realize a key recommendation put forth by the Pier 40 working group and create this proposal to expand on the minimum requirement for LGBT services on Pier 40.



“ As a transgirl I feel that I'm targeted by the police for reasons of being profiled. Other than going to the pier and hanging out with my friends I feel that a youth center would help me gain access to clothing and services like Job readiness and where I can go to get a job and not worry about transphobia. I feel that the LGBT youth center is a place to learn different things and not leave the pier.” **Jennifer, LGBT Youth Age 22**

## **LGBT Youth Services on Pier 40 Benefit All of Us**

The entire West Village community can benefit from a community-centered Pier 40 redevelopment project that incorporates the needs of LGBT youth by promoting opportunities for strengthening public health. These benefits include the importance of social networks to health and well-being, and help highlight the positive outcomes of development ini-

tiatives that put the community first. Private development negatively effects the community through displacing people and space. By designing and developing Pier 40 without the use of private development, we can provide a healthy sustainable community by:

- providing a stable and sustainable public space
- encouraging physical activity
- providing access to healthy, affordable foods
- providing a safe space to access health care and other social services
- providing opportunities for emotional outlets
- providing a space that promotes personal and professional development, and
- providing all of the above in a manner that empowers the community to access resources that are relevant and meaningful

With this community-centered framework, we present our visionary proposal to bring LGBT youth services to Pier 40 and hope that you share in the inspiration it brings.

“ A LGBT Youth Center will help give youth the opportunity to successfully complete school & become independent. Many youth that are homeless & living on the streets, haven't completed their general education years (K-12). Many people want to go back to school, but can't because they're homeless & have nowhere to go. At least by having a GED testing center & training, we can get kids back on the right path again. If there was a health center, many people would go, just to make sure that people are, & will always, remain safe for many years to come.” - **Jameel, 24**

# LGBT Youth Center Recommendation

This recommendation stands on the shoulders of a shared vision. The foundation of this proposal was developed through a community needs assessment of LGBT youth and LGBT service organizations [see sidebar] which identified the most crucial needs faced by LGBT youth. In developing this recommendation, we remained committed to a process that addressed the immediacy of the needs of LGBT youth and the boldness, creativity, and collaboration necessary to address those needs. We shared a vision that held the following principles:

## **Methodology: Community Needs Assessment**

Over the past year we have surveyed close to 300 LGBT youth from all over New York City who have overwhelmingly identified the need for a space for LGBT youth in the West Village near the Christopher Street Piers. These conversations have taken place during outreach in the West Village, on site at LGBT service organizations, and through our online outreach tools. In addition, we have also approached key LGBT service organizations who have identified needs through their service provision work, which have been incorporated in this proposal.

The results from this survey project have been compiled and are represented below.

- a healthy and vibrant West Village community is created out of a bold commitment to addressing the needs of everyone in the community, including LGBT youth
- a successful and effective LGBT Youth Center that is able to reach the maximum number of people with the maximum impact, is developed out of the needs identified by LGBT youth themselves
- a LGBT Youth Center that meets various needs identified by LGBT youth is successful using a collaborative model based on the input and investment from multiple stakeholders that provide a range of services [education, medical, recreational, etc]
- a successful LGBT Youth Center on Pier 40 would work in unison with the Hudson River Park's own mission to create a park that is available for all of New York to enjoy<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The Hudson River Park Act. Retrieved January 15, 2007 from <http://www.hudsonriverpark.com/pdfs/policies/act.pdf>.

## Program and Uses

To assure that the needs of this vulnerable community would be met, we surveyed almost 300 LGBT youth about their health and human service needs as well as how best those services might be delivered. We also reached out to youth-serving agencies throughout New York City already providing desperately needed services to this community the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center/Youth Enrichment Services, The Door, the Callen Lorde Community Health Center, and the Ali Forney Center. We identified these agencies based on their strong track record of successful and appropriate service provision to the LGBT and/or youth population. In one capacity or another, we have worked closely with these agencies to address the needs of our shared community. From them we have received a commitment to work together to best address the needs of LGBT youth in the West Village community. As we move forward, we will call on their expertise and commitment to serving these youth and will work to develop a plan to implement many of the programs and services they have helped to identify. Moreover, with several of these agencies, we will work to develop the most viable and appropriate structure to oversee and run the Center and its activities.

Through the youth surveys and agency feedback, we identified the following services that are a priority for a youth center serving LGBT young people in New York City. These areas were identified as the most pressing needs of young people. Many of these services would help fill the gaps that current exist in youth programming throughout the City. We believe, through our extensive partnerships with youth-serving agencies, we have the collective expertise needed to implement this plan. We have identified several potential partner organizations that have the experience, expertise and history of commitment to serving this community of young people and who we believe will make this project possible. While the LGBT Youth Center would not necessarily need to offer all of the programming listed below, we offer the following as an outline to guide the service design as this plan is further developed.

A list of needs identified by LGBT youth and service organizations is compiled below. Following this table, a narrative briefing reviews the functions and uses involved in each category. Additionally, in consideration of our recommendations we have included information that addresses the the feasibility of developing these uses on Pier 40 including structure, funding, zoning issues, and suggested architectural design.

## Uses and Services Identified by LGBT youth and Service Organizations

<p><b>Health/Mental Health and Medical Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drug and Alcohol Prevention Programs</li> <li>Mental Health Counseling</li> <li>Health Care Referrals</li> <li>Safe Hormones for Transgendered Youth</li> <li>Support Groups for Trans, Lesbian, and Gay Youth</li> <li>OBGYN</li> <li>HIV/AIDS Testing and Counseling</li> <li>Support Group for Trans and Queer Sex Workers</li> <li>Peer Counseling</li> </ul> <p><b>Education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educational Workshops</li> <li>Computer Lab</li> <li>GED Training and Test</li> <li>Leadership Development Training</li> <li>Sex and Safer Sex Education</li> <li>Civic Engagement</li> <li>Tutoring</li> <li>Dance</li> <li>Poetry Space</li> <li>Musical Instruments</li> </ul> <p><b>Recreation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basketball Court</li> <li>Lounge Area</li> <li>Pool Tables</li> <li>Game Room</li> </ul>	<p><b>Arts/Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local LGBT Events/Community Bulletin</li> <li>Art Programs</li> <li>Careers in the Arts Programming</li> <li>Arts and Crafts Space</li> <li>Performance and Studio Space</li> <li>Event Space</li> <li>Fashion Center</li> </ul> <p><b>Job Training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After School Program</li> <li>Job Resume Support</li> <li>Job Placement</li> </ul> <p><b>Other</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Movie Room</li> <li>Media Editing Space</li> <li>Garden</li> <li>Kitchen</li> <li>Recording Studio</li> <li>Meditation Room</li> <li>Clothing Donation</li> </ul>
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### Health/Mental Health and Medical Services

These uses would include direct counseling support, peer counseling, clinical services, and mentorship training programs. Additionally, programming would support the facilitation of various support groups that arise out of identified needs in the community. HIV and STI testing is readily available at all times, as well as transgender-sensitive medical staff and OBGYNs. A service organization with the expertise in providing these types of services to LGBT youth would provide the best avenue for providing these services in a safe and effective manner.

### Education

The educational programming provided in the center will help develop the leadership capacity of LGBT youth through a variety of workshops, discussion forums, and skills building activities led by LGBT youth. This would also include relevant sex education, tutoring services, and General Education Degree preparation test services. Civic engagement will also provide the space for LGBT youth to build

empowering community in decisions that impact their lives. In addition, there will be adequate programming to help support the development of skills and education in areas of the arts, history,



“The biggest reason my friends and I go to the West Village, along with other queer youth, is because we feel comfortable and safe there. The West Village is a place where I

don't have to be afraid to walk on the streets holding onto another guy and worrying about what people are going to say. The West Village is like a second home to me. I can go with my friends and bug out and be who I truly am inside without worrying about someone calling me a “faggot” or any other term that is offensive. I also feel that the West Village is a place where I can meet other youth that are going through the same issues as I am.” - **John, 18**

literature and poetry, music, and performance. An organization with the experience and commitment to empowering and educating low-income and at-risk youth would be best qualified to fill this role.

### Recreation

LGBT youth have identified the need to have access to resources to help stay healthy and active. There's no better way to do this than on Pier 40 where recreation and health are already a top priority. The LGBT youth Community Center will have access to basketball courts and an indoor gym. Another use that has been identified is a game room where other social and recreational activities can take place. Pier 40's current recreational focus adds to this use and offers up possibilities in shared field and sports use on the rest of the pier.

### Arts/Culture

Having space to create and display art and celebrate culture are a necessity and centerpiece of the LGBT Youth Center. Here we appreciate the vast variety of arts and cultures present in our community and work to create a space where all can be honored. This space will include square feet for events and performances. Arts and culture are prioritized through media editing labs, a recording studio, arts and crafts room, a fashion design center, and programming aimed at developing skills for employment in the arts.

### Job Training

Programming and resources will be provided to help LGBT youth find adequate and safe employment. Resume support and job-readiness workshops will be provided. Computer labs will support the success of this program. This will also be a space for other service agencies to advertise their services.

## Other

Other services identified by LGBT youth include a room and lounge to relax in as well as a garden and a kitchen. These uses help strengthen LGBT youth and help support the overall effort of community building by providing spaces of collective work and shared responsibility.

## Feasibility of a LGBT Youth Center on Pier 40

Based on these recommendations, FIERCE has enlisted the assistance and advisory capacity of the Urban Justice Center, Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLC, and Super-Interesting Design to address specific concerns and questions that may arise out of the proposed vision for LGBT Services on Pier 40. Some of the concerns briefly addressed in this proposal include management structure, funding, legal land use and zoning, as well as physical appearance and architectural considerations.

### Zoning Analysis for Proposed Uses

There are three sources of regulation over the Pier 40 site: (1) the Hudson River Park Act (HRPA); (2) the associated Hudson River Park Rules & Regulations (HRPRR) empowered under the HRPA; and (3) New York City zoning code.<sup>5</sup> For a use to be allowed on the site, it must not violate these sources of regulation. It should be noted that the Pier 40 site is currently zoned M2-3, which is termed a “medium manufacturing district.”<sup>6</sup> This proposal recognizes the limitations set up by this zoning code in relation to our proposed use of space and activities. Below, you will find our strategy for addressing these limitations and working within the Hudson River Park Act to make the LGBT Youth Center feasible for Pier 40.

Our recommendation to bring a LGBT Youth Center to Pier 40 is strengthened by the design and integration of the Center to fit into other desired uses on Pier 40. For example, we are committed to maintaining the piers “passive and active open space” and see this space and an opportunity to build stronger community ties with LGBT youth.

If the LGBT Youth Center would receive any government money for use in developing its plans we understand that that the Hudson River Park Act requires an environmental review under the State Environmental Quality Review Act. We are still in the process of exploring the requirements under the act if State funding is utilized.

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<sup>5</sup> Hudson River Park Act, (5).

<sup>6</sup> New York City Zoning Resolution C8-4.

Under current regulations, drug and alcohol counseling services, HIV testing services, or mental health counseling services would not be permitted uses on the Pier 40 site. Not-for-profit medical, health and mental health care facilities are designated “use group 4” under New York City zoning code.<sup>7</sup> Uses in this group are only allowed in residential-zoned districts.<sup>8</sup> Since Pier 40 is currently zoned a medium manufacturing district, variances would need to be obtained for these vital uses. The importance of having access to services past 1 am is inconsistent with the HRPRR which prohibit persons from entering the park between the hours of 1 am and 6 am.<sup>9</sup> However, the HRPT has discretion to issue a variance of any rule if there are “significant practical difficulties, or unnecessary hardships” that are not caused by the applicant of the variance.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, public access past the hour of 1 am could be granted by a variance issued by the HRPT.

The presence of a garden for the LGBT Center would also require a variance. Gardens are classified use group 17 by the New York City zoning code,<sup>11</sup> and are allowed in M2-3 districts.<sup>12</sup> However, the keeping of gardening tools in the park is prohibited by the HRPRA unless it is de minimus or allowed by a variance.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, it is illegal to “plant, prune, maintain, fertilize or interfere with any trees, plants, flowers, shrubbery or other vegetation in any area under the jurisdiction of the Trust”, without a variance<sup>14</sup> Because it would be illegal to keep gardening tools or engage in the act of gardening on the site without a variance, it would be necessary to obtain one from the HRPT in order to maintain a garden on the site.

Under the New York City zoning code, it is legal to operate “physical culture or health establishments, including gymnasiums” without a special permit that is granted by the Board of Standards and Appeals,<sup>15</sup> which is the municipal judicial body that interprets the New York City zoning code.<sup>16</sup> The pres-

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<sup>7</sup> New York City Zoning Resolution 22-14.

<sup>8</sup> Id.

<sup>9</sup> Hudson River Park Rules and Regulations 751.4a1.

<sup>10</sup> Id, 751.2.

<sup>11</sup> New York City Zoning Resolution 42-14 (c).

<sup>12</sup> New York City Zoning Resolution 42-14.

<sup>13</sup> Hudson River Park Rules and Regulations 751.6b4.

<sup>14</sup> Hudson River Park Rules and Regulations 751.7j.

<sup>15</sup> New York City Zoning Resolution 42-31.

<sup>16</sup> The official website of the Board of Standards and Appeals, available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/bsa/html/mission/mission.shtml>, (last visited November 12, 2007) (“The Board is empowered by the City Charter to interpret the meaning or applicability of the Zoning Resolution, Building and Fire Codes, Multiple Dwelling Law, and Labor Law. This power includes the ability to vary in certain instances the provisions of these regulations. The majority of the Board’s activity involves reviewing and deciding applications for variances and special permits, as empowered by the Zoning Resolution...”).

ence of sports and recreation facilities in the center at Pier 40<sup>17</sup>, although not in line with the current zoning regulations, could also be made possible through a variance process.

## **Funding Sources**

There are several sources of funding that may be available to organizations seeking support for youth services on Pier 40. In addition to the many private foundations that have supported LGBT youth services for years, there is a growing number of government grants that are prioritizing the needs of LGBT youth. The City's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) has also prioritized the needs of this vulnerable population over the last few years. The New York State Department of Health has set aside money to support health and human services for the LGBT community. Requests for proposals are also released every few years and has prioritized the needs of the most vulnerable members of the LGBT community, including youth and homeless and people of color.

## **Description of Architectural Design**

We propose not only to maintain but to re-emphasize Pier 40 as community and recreation space. Our design for the LGBT Youth Center comprises acts of perforation, cutting, slicing, opening for views, light, connection and intersection. These voids are not only hallways but spaces for gathering – lounges, galleries. They not only divide but organize, creating zones that are both large and small, public and private, and interstitial moments that transcend such simple dualities. More public and larger functions (lobby, administrative, games, flexible lounge, events space) reside on the lower level while somewhat more private ones (classrooms, music and art, offices) are on top. The perforations selectively expose activities – events, games, work – that exemplify the objectives of the center, and they also center the Center itself within its context on the edge – framing views of water and air and the Christopher Street pier itself.

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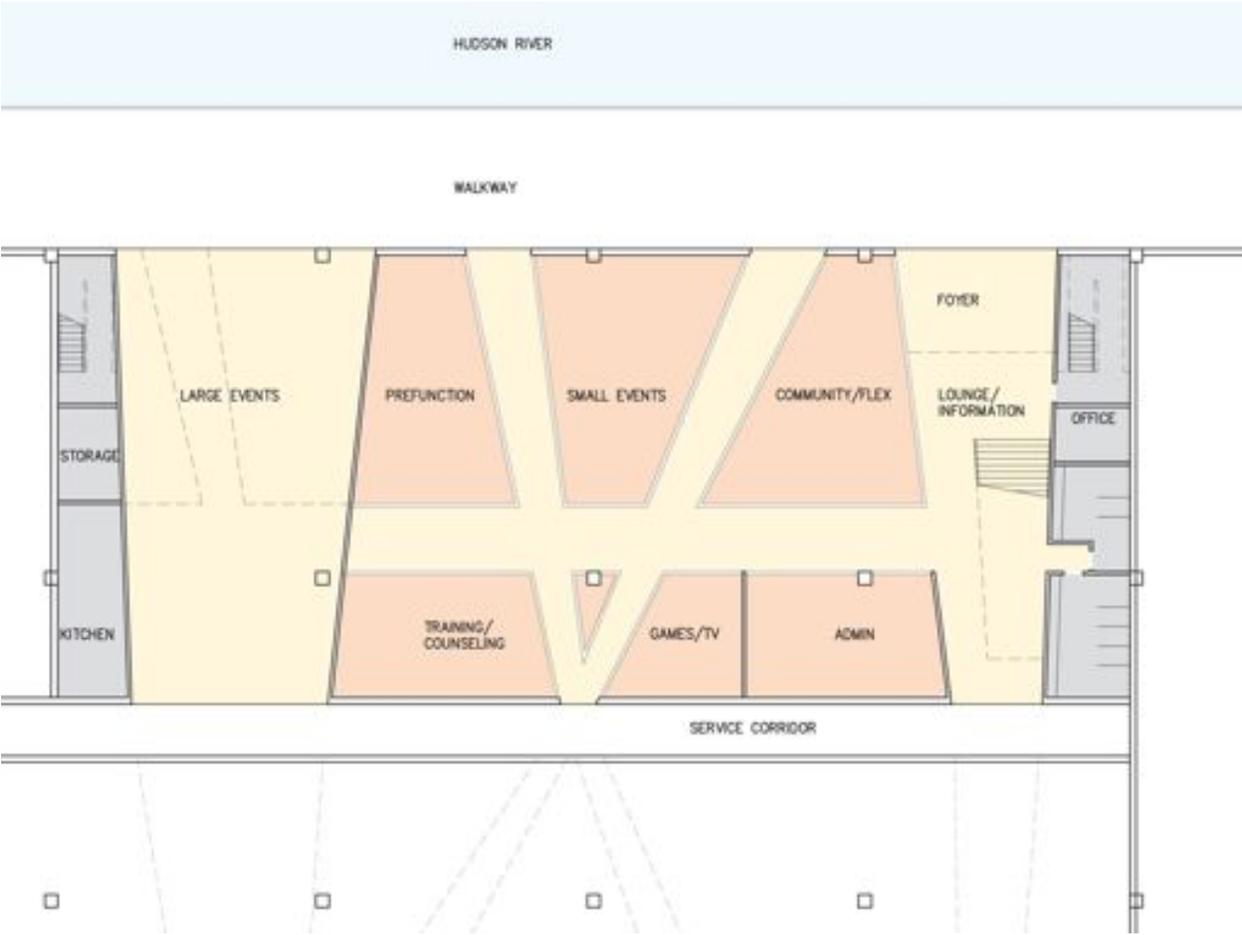
<sup>17</sup> Fight Brews Over Plans to Reinvent Hudson Pier, by Timothy Williams, the New York Times, 5/3/2007.

## Conclusion

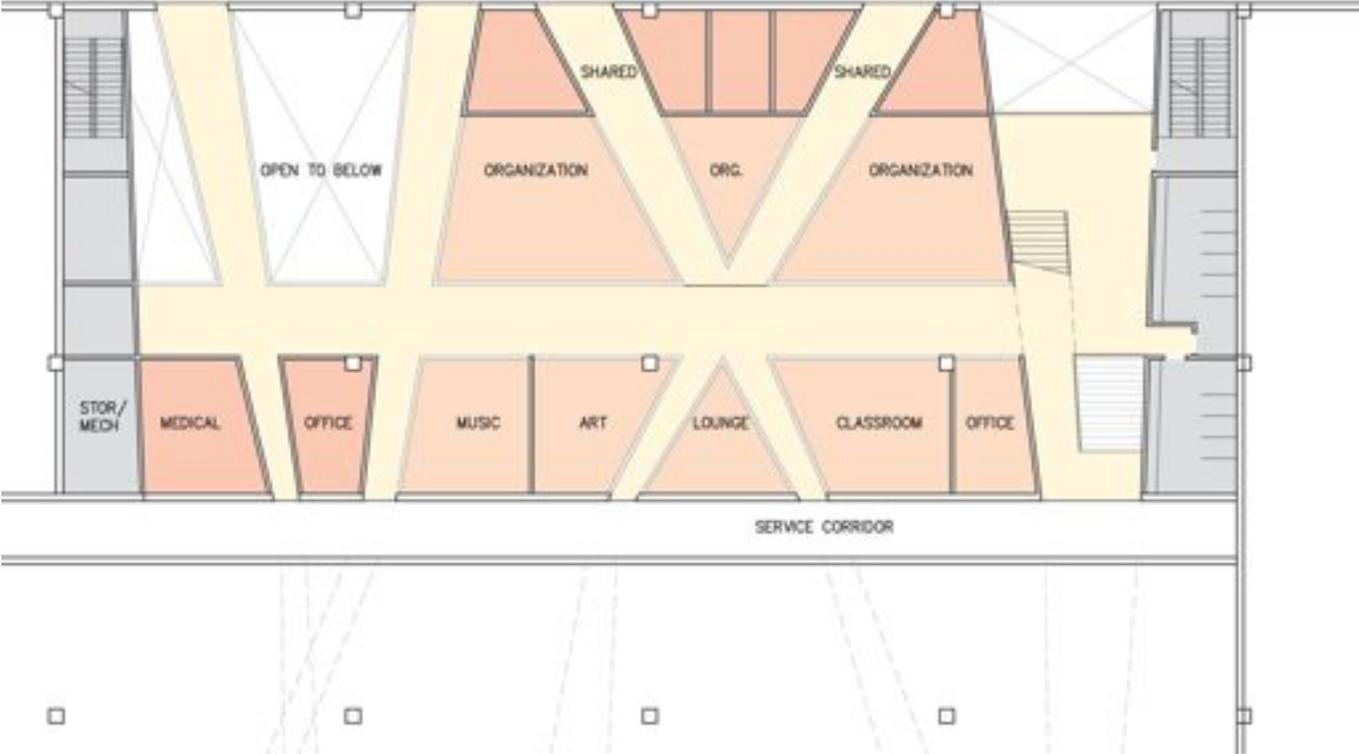
Based on the possible uses on Pier 40 identified by LGBT youth, service organizations, and the Pier 40 Working Group coupled with the urgent need of these services in the West Village and Christopher Street area (Pier 45) we believe that Pier 40 should be redeveloped:

- without the use of a private developer and
- with a minimum requirement for a late night LGBT Youth Center that houses services for employment, housing, and a safe space to build community and improve the quality of life for all in the West Village.

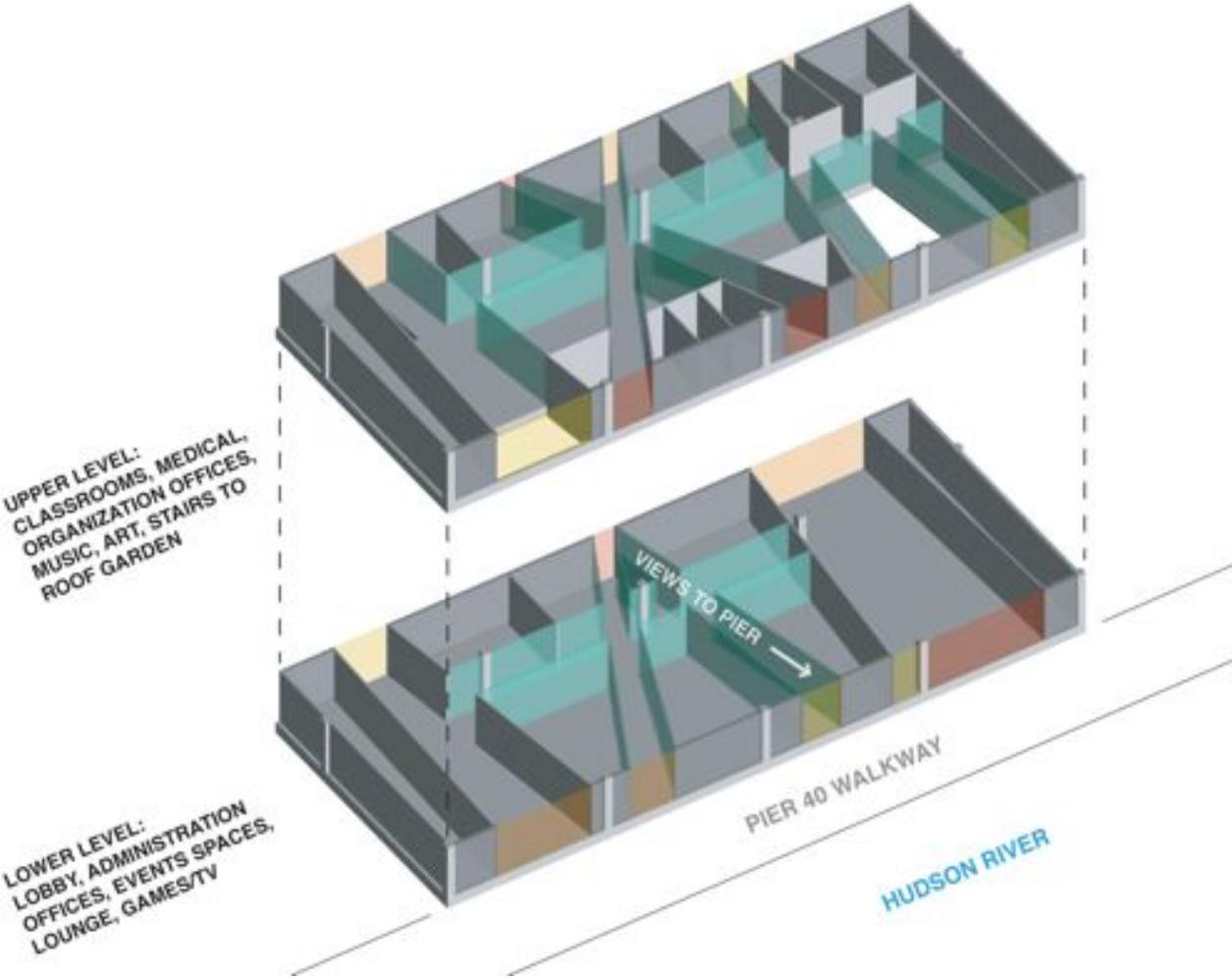
**Lower Level Floor Plans**



**Upper Level Floor Plans**



# Upper Level and Lower Level



**Area map of Pier 40 and location of LGBT Youth Center**

