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## **Testimony Before the New York City Council Housing and Buildings Committee Regarding Oversight “Housing Our Neighbors” plan**

July 1, 2022

Thank you to Committee Chair Sanchez and members of the Housing and Buildings Committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Emily Goldstein, and I am the Director of Organizing and Advocacy at the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD).

### **About the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD)**

ANHD is one of the City’s leading policy, advocacy, technical assistance, and capacity-building organizations. We maintain a membership of 80+ neighborhood-based and city-wide nonprofit organizations that have affordable housing and/or equitable economic development as a central component of their mission. We bridge the power and impact of our member groups to build community power and ensure the right to affordable housing and thriving, equitable neighborhoods for all New Yorkers. We value justice, equity and opportunity, and we believe in the importance of movement building that centers marginalized communities in our work. We believe housing justice is economic justice is racial justice.

### **Housing Our Neighbors Plan Background & Overview**

For many years, ANHD has advocated for the City to move away from the problematic affordable housing unit count goals of past housing plans. That metric led to a focus on so-called affordable housing solutions that just chased after numbers instead of prioritizing the needs of struggling New Yorkers. Instead, we should be focusing on the outcomes our communities need – ending homelessness, preventing displacement, eliminating rent burdens, and ensuring safe, healthy housing for all. We appreciate that Mayor Adams has set forth a housing plan that takes a new approach, and sets aside the unit count goal model of the past several mayors. We believe this creates an opportunity to focus instead on the human impacts of our housing policies, with metrics that better correspond to the outcomes that matter most.

We also applaud the Administration for incorporating the full spectrum of housing, from homelessness to NYCHA to tenant protections to homeownership in the Housing Our Neighbors blueprint. Neither our movement nor our government can afford to keep treating housing issues as though they exist in their own separate silos, nor can achieving ambitious goals like ending homelessness be seen as the responsibility and purview of just one agency.

However, the plan published by the Administration does not lay out clear and transparent policies, metrics, and timelines. These are essential for accountability, and for evaluating progress and success. Doing away with unit counts as the goal should not and need not mean a lack of clarity on the Mayor’s commitments nor a lack of ability for the Council and the public to evaluate success towards concrete goals. Some metrics to consider in evaluating the

success of this (or any) housing plan are: reduction in rent burdened and extremely rent burdened households; reduction in homelessness; increased homeownership access for low income and especially BIPOC families; reduction in households experiencing health and safety dangers in their homes; matching of affordability levels of the city's term sheets to New Yorkers' needs; and, crucially, elimination of racial disparities in all measures of housing access, safety, and security.

### **Homelessness**

We commend Housing Our Neighbors' inclusion of all five shelter systems to streamline our homeless set-aside unit referral process so we can move homeless New Yorkers into permanent housing faster, as homeless advocates and non-profit developers of affordable and supportive housing have pushed for. We also support the goal of delivering 15,000 supportive housing units two years ahead of schedule, but to end homelessness we need concrete and measurable goals to end homelessness backed by deep investments in housing development and preservation.

### **Land use, public land, and housing development**

ANHD supports using targeted zoning, land use, and development policies to create more affordable housing throughout the city, particularly in neighborhoods that are not producing enough today. These changes include supporting the creation of Accessory Dwelling Units, converting vacant hotels to affordable and supportive housing, and rezoning under-utilized government-owned land for deeply affordable housing. However, zoning and policy changes to promote more and more varied residential development must be rooted in the principles of land use equity to ensure a more just distribution of density and investments, and to empower communities that have not had a say in planning their futures.

Any citywide zoning change to allow greater square footage for affordable housing must be crafted with a laser focus on developing 100% deeply affordable housing. Any development of public land must maximize public benefit and reflect local needs and should be implemented by non-profit, mission-driven developers and community-based organizations. Additionally, public investments in quality-of-life improvements in areas of the city that have not received key amenities and services must not be traded for new, primarily market-rate density.

We also support a comprehensive approach to housing development that includes diverse and innovative housing typologies and models such as single-room occupancies, shared housing, shared equity cooperatives and community land trusts. We are also happy to see a commitment to lowering construction costs through regulatory reforms, innovative new building techniques, and streamlined agency processes. However, streamlining and innovation alone is not sufficient – these measures must be accompanied by robust investments in deeply affordable housing preservation and development, including staff capacity at city agencies.

We are excited to see a commitment to revamping the Neighborhood Pillars Program with a downpayment assistance fund to support the acquisition of properties by non-profits and M/WBEs, including ANHD members, to redevelop and preserve as affordable housing. To be successful, any revamp of Neighborhood Pillars needs to be accompanied by a serious funding commitment. We are also encouraged to see the blueprint's prioritization of M/WBE and

BIPOC-led non-profit mission-driven developers. This stated priority must be accompanied by clear metrics, such as a percentage of HPD capital commitments.

### **Tenant rights**

The housing plan rightly draws the connection between housing and health. We applaud the focus on proactive enforcement to ensure that tenants have safe, healthy homes, and the commitment to bring proactive harassment cases in housing court to protect tenants' rights. Far too often, tenants live with health and safety violations for years, navigating inspections and housing court dates while their apartments continue to deteriorate. The Administration must work with community organizations and tenant leaders to identify the gaps and flaws in the city's inspection and enforcement models, and should increase and enforce penalties to landlords who endanger their tenants health and well-being with repeated violations.

ANHD members have been participants in the Partners in Preservation program in the neighborhoods where it was piloted, and we will be glad to see it expanded. But the Administration's plan gives insufficient attention to successful programs such as Right to Counsel that came directly out of grassroots organizing efforts. Far more resources are needed to fund tenant organizing and legal assistance, increase staffing at HPD and other agencies, and aggressively pursue preservation options that center the interests of tenants including transfer of ownership to non-profit, mission-driven developers and options for transition to cooperative ownership models.

### **Homeownership**

We applaud the Mayor's plan for recognizing the importance of homeownership for low and moderate-income and BIPOC New Yorkers, including doubling down payment assistance funding and expanding HomeFix. At the same time, we are concerned about a continuation of race-neutral policies to promote homeownership that do not explicitly address racism, redlining, and discrimination. New York City needs to create targeted programs for people of color to access and maintain homeownership, create a more equitable tax structure, and expand discrimination enforcement to test for fair lending violations and appraisal bias. We also need a more concerted focus on housing counseling, anti-displacement, and foreclosure prevention for the same populations.

### **Conclusion**

The Administration has highlighted their outreach to a wide range of stakeholders in developing the Blueprint they released. We urge both the Administration and the Council to turn to the expertise of those members of our communities most directly impacted by homelessness and housing insecurity to develop specific policy solutions, funding targets, and measures of success that fill in the vague areas of the released Blueprint.

ANHD looks forward to working with the City Council and the Administration to ensure that our city's housing policies, programs, and investments address the needs of our communities, and especially that they center improvements to the housing conditions and stability of those new yorkers most impacted by the homelessness and affordability crisis our city faces.

If you have any questions or for more information, please contact Emily Goldstein at [emily.g@anhd.org](mailto:emily.g@anhd.org).

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