

A Community Platform for Equitable Neighborhood Planning

The de Blasio Administration has set itself the ambitious goal of bridging the “tale of two cities” and creating a more equitable New York. The Administration has rightly recognized affordable housing as a central piece of achieving its equity agenda, and as part of its affordable housing plan has announced its intentions to rezone 15 neighborhoods in New York City over the next several years. Our communities, like the de Blasio Administration, want our neighborhoods to grow and thrive. And we know that building a more equitable city is not just about building housing or changing zoning – it’s about building communities, and about sharing burdens and services fairly throughout the city.

Under previous administrations, local neighborhoods often bore the brunt of a heavy-handed top-down planning approach, that left many local residents displaced by rising housing costs and speculation. Neighborhoods may have been transformed, but they were no longer for the people who previously lived there. Similarly, without a careful balance of priorities and needs, local businesses and the jobs that went with them have often been lost, to the detriment of the community and the city. Our communities are rightfully concerned about the future of our neighborhoods as new rezonings are proposed.

We are concerned that the experiences of those communities where the rezoning process has begun have not lived up to the inspiring vision that the mayor has put forth. What is needed is a comprehensive approach to neighborhood planning that works with the community to first ensure that a neighborhood gets what it needs to thrive, and then determines how they can also help the city grow.

Community-based organizations from across the City have come together to encourage the Administration to take a fresh, productive approach to neighborhood planning that engages true community partnerships. In order to ensure that all future rezonings meet communities’ and the Administration’s shared goals for a more equitable city, we call on the Administration to implement policies to further these principles before proceeding with any rezonings:

Commit to a Process with Community Engagement that Incorporates the Priorities of Local Neighborhoods

WORK WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS TO ENSURE THAT COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE MEANINGFULLY ENGAGED.

A comprehensive process for community engagement should include mechanisms for meaningful input at every stage of planning process, and transparency and accountability throughout the rezoning process. This requires proper outreach to local residents about opportunities to engage in the planning process, consistent timelines, timely notices, language accessibility, and publicly accessible materials and information. Deep community engagement should occur consistently throughout the process, from the time the neighborhood is initially identified as a possible rezoning site, to pre-ULURP, ULURP, and post-rezoning implementation. Furthermore, while the process is important, it is a means, not an end – community input must be reflected in the plans that go to ULURP and in the rezonings that ultimately take place.

PROVIDE RESOURCES AND FUNDING TO SUPPORT LOCAL ORGANIZING AND ENSURE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

A rezoning requires an enormous amount of effort, time, education and resources from the City, but also from local community groups. These community groups need support so that they can help their local community members fully participate in the planning process. Without serious and sustained efforts by local community-based organizations, real participation by large numbers of community members who will be impacted by rezonings is unlikely.

A Community Platform for Equitable Neighborhood Planning

Pro-Actively Preserve Neighborhoods' Existing Affordable Housing

PUT IN PLACE STRONG AND EFFECTIVE ANTI-DISPLACEMENT MECHANISMS PRIOR TO ANY REZONINGS.

A neighborhood's existing residents already call it home and we must take careful consideration of how a rezoning may adversely impact neighborhood affordability and residents' lives. We must ensure that existing residents are not displaced due to real estate speculation or rising market pressures of rezonings, or communities run a real risk of losing more affordable housing than they gain.

Building market-rate housing isn't a neutral act. We know from hard experience that bringing in a critical mass of new market rate tenants changes the neighborhood and puts displacement pressure on existing affordable housing, even outside of the footprint of the rezoning itself. Even including more affordable housing in the newly constructed buildings doesn't make up for losing existing affordable housing that current residents depend on and call home. The recently announced new funding for legal support for tenants facing displacement is a great start, but it cannot be the only tool to fight displacement.

Neighborhoods need proactive policies in place to protect them from the adverse effects of rising prices and gentrification. And because communities begin to feel displacement pressures long before a rezoning is completed, the city needs to put measures in place that proactively protect neighborhood residents before the announcement that a neighborhood may be rezoned sets off a wave of speculation.

Strong protections are needed for residents in a wide range of types of affordable housing, including subsidized housing, public housing, rent-regulated apartments, and small homes and unregulated apartments that have been kept affordable due to cooler market conditions. In some past rezonings, such measures were included and have been instrumental in combatting the displacement pressures that have arisen as those rezoned neighborhoods' prices have soared. In other neighborhoods, the lack of such measures has been sorely felt.

Build Permanent New Affordable Housing Units that Meet the Affordability Needs of Current Residents

BUILD NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

Our neighborhoods and our city need more affordable housing at affordability levels appropriate to local residents' income levels. The old 80/20 model has not worked for communities – it has not been enough affordable housing units and it has not been the right affordability levels. The lowest-income New Yorkers are the most rent burdened, but have been underserved by existing affordable housing development programs. Currently, much of the affordable housing that gets built is unaffordable for the majority of families in many neighborhoods where it is built. New affordable housing built under Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning and any other programs to be used in the rezoned areas must be targeted to meet local communities' real needs, and should be targeted to help preserve the mix of diverse incomes in the neighborhood. The City will not address its affordable housing crisis or gain local support for affordable housing promises if it continues to create subsidized units that are too expensive for local community residents.

A Community Platform for Equitable Neighborhood Planning

SELECT TRUSTED, LOCAL NONPROFIT COMMUNITY DEVELOPERS AS THE LONG-TERM STEWARDS OF NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS.

Land is scarce in our city, and that land under the city's control or influence should be used in the community interest permanently, not be given away for short-term gain. Nonprofit Community Developers that reinvest profits and economic impact from new developments back into the community have been shut out of the development process. The city should stop the practice of gifting land to for-profit developers who do not guarantee the long-term interests of the community. Instead, trusted local community developers and nonprofits need to be the stewards of this new development whenever possible to preserve long-term community assets and interests.

Furthermore, special protections should be put in place to protect the long-term future of our City's Public Housing resources. A community review process should be put in place for any new development or disposition of land controlled by NYCHA.

MAKE PERMANENTLY AFFORDABLE HOUSING TO ENSURE LONG-TERM COMMUNITY BENEFIT.

Mayor de Blasio has committed to investing in the production of new affordable housing units in these rezoned areas. However, currently much of the affordable housing being built will expire and transition to market-rate rents in the near future. Our communities are being asked to accept long-term changes to their neighborhood in the form of new market-rate housing; they should get long-term community benefits in return. Affordable housing units in rezonings and throughout the city should be permanently affordable so that we best maximize our investment in this critical public benefit. We need to look not just at the situation of the neighborhood now, nor 20 to 30 years from now, but instead make lasting decisions that serve the public need long into the future.

Support and Invest in Local Businesses and Ensure Quality Job Opportunities for Local Residents

ENSURE THAT REZONINGS PRESERVE LOCAL INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL BUSINESSES.

Our communities do not just need more housing – we need balanced neighborhoods. Our neighborhoods must be able to meet the needs of a wide range of residents – particularly those living in public and subsidized housing, who are often ignored. Local small businesses are an important source of jobs as well as services that our communities need, and should be retained and strengthened. The industrial sector in particular provides good, career-oriented employment for many New Yorkers who otherwise lack access to similarly well-paid work. Many of these businesses are already at risk due to speculation and porous zoning. Income and housing affordability go hand in hand. We need to ensure that in the course of developing new housing, we avoid eliminating good jobs and thereby creating even more need for affordable housing.

MAXIMIZE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS TO ACCESS QUALITY JOBS.

Quality jobs for local community members should be preserved and created throughout the rezoning process. Local hiring, including state-approved apprenticeship training for long-term careers, should be prioritized in the construction projects that result from rezonings, and union labor should be used wherever possible. Existing permanent jobs should be preserved, not sacrificed, to help protect the stability of local families' incomes and livelihoods. New permanent jobs that are created should be at family-supporting wages, and should prioritize local hiring. And local community residents should have access to high quality workforce development trainings that align directly with the growing career opportunities in their growing rezoned neighborhood.

A Community Platform for Equitable Neighborhood Planning

Build Up Local Community Facilities and Infrastructure in Conjunction with New Housing Development

INVEST UP FRONT IN COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE.

Rezoning has a widespread impact on the fabric of a neighborhood. New development, and particularly increased housing density, can put pressure on existing neighborhood infrastructure and supports, particularly in areas that are already underserved. Investment in schools, parks, transit, drainage and other basic infrastructure needs that exist or will result from added density cannot wait for a future process. Steps must be taken up front to guarantee the implementation (not just potential) of needed infrastructure changes to accommodate a growing neighborhood.

MITIGATE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND ENSURE ADHERENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCY PRINCIPLES.

Our communities' long term health and safety must be prioritized, and rezonings should be seen as an opportunity to develop smarter. In particular there must be careful planning and where necessary mitigation for our waterfront area neighborhoods, areas with potential soil contamination, and other environmental hazards.

In many of the neighborhoods where rezoning is being discussed, local residents and businesses rebuilt and maintained their communities through New York City's periods of disinvestment and decline. Our communities want to see the investments our neighborhoods need, and we want our communities to be able to grow and develop to include new residents, businesses and services – but we do not want development to come at the expense of the people who live and work in our communities already. We believe that by embracing the principles outlined here, the Administration and our communities can move forward together towards a more equitable city.

Endorsed by: Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development; Brooklyn Legal Services Corp A; CAAAV; CASA New Settlement; Cypress Hills LDC; Coalition for Community Advancement: Progress for East New York/Cypress Hills; Evergreen; Fifth Avenue Committee; Good Old Lower East Side; Housing Conservation Coordinators; Hope Community; Local Development Corporation of East New York; Los Sures; Lott Community Development; MinKwon Center for Community Action; Mosque 7c Nation of Islam; Neighbors Helping Neighbors; Pratt Area Community Council ; Pratt Center for Community Development; United Community Centers; Urban Justice Center; Ron Schiffman, City Planning Commission member 1990-1996; *list in formation*