

New York Note: Council Holds Hearing on City of Yes for Housing Opportunity

Overview

On October 21-22, 2024, the NYC Council Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises held two hearings to discuss the third of three City of Yes zoning initiatives, the "City of Yes for Housing Opportunity" proposal, aimed at addressing New York City's housing crisis by updating zoning regulations. The hearings featured testimony from city officials, public organizations, and residents, with discussions focused on increasing housing supply, affordability, and the impact on specific neighborhoods. Full videos of the hearings are available [here](#), with transcripts and testimony available soon.

DCP Presentation and Councilmember Discussion

Dan Garodnick, Director of the Department of City Planning, presented the City of Yes proposal as a targeted strategy involving high-density residential districts, transit-oriented development, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and eliminating parking mandates, among other things. He emphasized that the proposal is not a blanket solution but rather a carefully tailored plan designed to meet neighborhood-specific needs. He also highlighted that while zoning reform is essential, it must be supplemented by broader measures like affordability initiatives and housing preservation efforts.

Councilmembers expressed both support and concerns. Key issues noted by the Council included the proposal's impact on parking regulations and the safety of basement units during potential flooding. Speaker Adrienne Adams and Chair Rafael Salamanca underscored the importance of a holistic approach, arguing that zoning changes alone cannot solve the city's housing crisis. They called for a comprehensive strategy involving tenant protections, affordability measures, and community investments to create sustainable and accessible housing for all New Yorkers. Many Councilmembers also stressed the need for robust community engagement to ensure the plan adapts to the unique characteristics of each neighborhood.

Public Testimony

The second hearing, held on the morning of the 22nd, focused on public testimony, with over 700 individuals registered to speak. Several organizations, including Enterprise Community Partners and Habitat for Humanity, expressed strong support for the City of Yes for Housing Opportunity proposal, citing its potential to increase housing diversity and address homelessness. These groups highlighted the benefits of zoning flexibility, ADUs, and converting office spaces as essential steps to expanding housing, particularly in low-density areas.

However, some community boards and residents, particularly from SOHO, Noho, and Queens, raised concerns about potential negative impacts. They argued that the proposal might lead to gentrification, reduce green spaces, and compromise neighborhood character, especially in historic districts. Critics also worried that the plan could incentivize luxury developments over affordable housing, failing to meet the needs of existing communities. Several speakers called for modifications, such as maintaining certain contextual zoning protections and ensuring that new developments include affordable housing units.

Many participants emphasized the need for a collaborative approach, advocating for city planners to work closely with communities to find balanced solutions that integrate development and preservation. Suggestions included expanding basement legalization programs, improving rental



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assistance, and partnering with community-based nonprofits to provide tenant services, ensuring that the proposal supports both new housing growth and the stability of existing residents.

The Council will now vote on the proposal in the coming weeks.
