



American Planning Association  
**New York Metro Chapter**

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*Making Great Communities Happen*

January 1, 2014

The Honorable William de Blasio  
Mayor  
City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

**RE: Priorities for the New Administration**

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

Congratulations on being elected the 109<sup>th</sup> mayor of New York City. As you begin a new chapter in New York's rich history, we hope to work with you in formulating your policy agenda on issues related to the physical, social and economic environment of the City.

The New York Metro Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) is part of a 40,000-member national organization and represents 1,300 practicing planners, urban design and community development professionals involved in the planning and design of the region's communities across New York's metropolitan region. The Chapter has surveyed its general membership and worked closely with its committees of issue-area experts to write this letter identifying the most critical urban issues facing your administration along with solutions and strategies to effectively plan for a healthy, sustainable, and just city. The Chapter also recognizes input from our diverse partner organizations for their contributions: American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P), and Legal Services New York City (LS-NYC). In this capacity, the Chapter and its partners hope to collaborate closely with your administration on planning-related issues that affect the City both in the immediate future and for the long-term.

The Chapter strongly agrees with your major goal of restoring a sense of equity and inclusion. For all of the economic success the City has experienced in recent years, the benefits have been concentrated in too few places and the result has been a city increasingly divided along socioeconomic lines. We offer an alternative vision that supports your values and presents an opportunity to strengthen our City's economy, resiliency, and quality of life for all New Yorkers.

Our main policy objectives and priorities are broken into specific topic areas as follows:



## **Economic Development**

Although the city has largely rebounded from the initial hit by the 2008 financial crisis, the recovery has not been uniform across all sectors. The downturn clearly illustrated the risks of relying on a single industry, in this case financial services, to carry the City's economy. There is an overarching need for strategic capital investment and for a diversified economy with a strong manufacturing base, a climate conducive for entrepreneurial business and a powerful hospitality and tourism industry. The City should strengthen its efforts to:

- ED-1. Expand job opportunities beyond Manhattan by supporting and expanding the industrial and manufacturing sectors. This would include re-evaluating zoning and regulatory policies that encourage residential development over industrial retention and needlessly drive up the cost of manufacturing.
- ED-2. Connect job opportunities in the growing technology sector with residents in low and moderate income neighborhoods through workforce development and vocational training.
- ED-3. Encourage greater investment in the "outerboroughs", by boosting the administrative capacity of non-profit and government entities. Consider emulating the Chicago program whereby the city has created "delegate agencies" that provide funding to non-profit organizations at the neighborhood level to support small business development and related activities.
- ED-4. Re-evaluate the rezoning proposal for the area known as "East Midtown" to enable redevelopment for mixed commercial and residential uses, appropriately scaled, and to ensure that additional capacity needed for infrastructure and transportation systems is properly funded and phased.
- ED-5. Continue to develop and leverage public-private partnerships, including the formation of Business Improvement Districts that enable communities to self-finance physical improvements that increase economic competitiveness.

## **Housing**

While the City's growing popularity, especially among young adults, is certainly a positive sign, it has exacerbated the problem of housing affordability with many neighborhoods now priced out of reach for the middle-class resident. The Chapter strongly supports your vision statement for safe, affordable housing and has the following specific recommendations:

- H-1. Enact mandatory inclusionary zoning regulations that require a minimum percentage of affordable units in all residential development.



- Affordable must be defined to include units for those at 50 and 80% of Area Median Income (AMI). There must be a mix of unit sizes and all must be kept affordable in perpetuity. Conversely, we must assure that already low-income neighborhoods are not further segregated by those looking to benefit from higher density allowed by inclusionary zoning, without providing proper opportunities for moderate and middle-income residents (80-120% AMI).
- H-2. Require new affordable housing to be as energy efficient as possible, incorporating on-site energy production when feasible, with a goal of net zero energy consumption. Utility bills in an inefficient building can consume as much as 25% of a family's budget.
  - H-3. Reinvest in public housing using Housing Authority land for community-planned, mix-use development that will provide social and commercial services, facilitate the movement of over-housed persons to more appropriately sized units, and generate revenues to support the maintenance of Housing Authority properties.
  - H-4. Preserve affordable housing by strengthening tenant regulations, housing agency coordination, providing legal services and promoting energy efficiency:
    - a. New York City, and not the State, should administer the laws and regulations governing the preservation and stabilization of NYC rental housing.
    - b. Establish centralized communication amongst agencies charged with enforcement of housing maintenance and building codes and enforcement of rent regulatory systems and public assistance agencies.
    - c. Provide legal services for low and moderate income tenants and families facing eviction or foreclosure.
    - d. Advance programs and projects that utilize renewable energy sources. Improve consumer awareness of the many programs at the City and State levels that incentivize the construction and retrofit of energy-efficient housing.
  - H-5. Ensure that the development of affordable housing is part of a comprehensive strategy that involves local community input. Rezoning proposals should be reviewed with neighborhood groups to determine the type, size and location of housing that addresses local needs.



- H-6. Provide more affordable homeownership opportunities as the City is rapidly losing its working middle class to the suburbs and other regions. The Bronx, for example, has the lowest homeownership rate of any county in New York State at 19 percent. Subsidized multi-family homeownership, such as in cooperatives and condominiums, has proven successful in providing positive impacts to neighborhoods by assuring long-term investment.

### **Transportation**

The City can proudly boast it has the highest utilization of public transit in the nation; however problems persist with capacity and aging infrastructure. In a political climate in which the availability of federal resources is likely to continue dwindling, the City will need creative strategies to maintain, upgrade and expand its transportation systems. We would especially like for the City to continue its focus on non-motorized transportation (pedestrian-only streets, Bike Share, etc.). Our specific recommendations:

- T-1. Emphasize and support the creation of multi-modal corridors (“complete streets”) that promote the benefits of walking and encourage local shopping and dining.
- T-2. Continue to build and maintain a safe bicycle transportation network which includes amenities such as bike racks, corrals and signage. Create what are known nationally as “bicycle friendly business districts”.
- T-3. Where feasible, create a true Bus Rapid Transit network of dedicated right-of-way and infrastructure that expands the system’s capabilities beyond the current *Select Bus Service* program.
- T-4. Assure that the Second Avenue Subway is completed and that infrastructure is in place for future expansion to The Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens.
- T-5. Assure the expansion of the Metro-North Railroad to Penn Station via both the New Haven and Hudson lines. Expansion would create new stations at Co-op City, Morris Park, Parkchester and Hunts Point in The Bronx, and at Sunnyside in Queens along the New Haven line, and in Harlem and the Upper West Side along the Hudson line. This would provide residents access to jobs in surrounding cities and suburbs by providing “reverse commute” opportunities.
- T-6. Expand service on LIRR and Metro-North stations in isolated, lower-income areas, such as Far Rockaway in Queens, and Melrose in The Bronx.



## **Waterfront Revitalization**

While the planning and redevelopment of the City's 520 miles of shoreline has been underway for over twenty years, a new set of challenges and priorities have emerged in the Post-Sandy era where issues of resilience, reinvestment, public access, and public engagement are essential. We recommend the following:

- WR-1. Update the borough-specific plans that accompanied the City's first comprehensive waterfront plan in the 1990s. They were developed in collaboration with the borough offices of the Department of City Planning through a widely-praised public participation process that covered each of the 22 waterfront reaches. The updated borough plans will bridge the gap between recent citywide waterfront plans and each of the City's waterfront communities.
  
- WR-2. Create a *Waterfront Lab* for new proposals that could advance sustainable waterfront planning, design and implementation by testing ideas, producing data, and monitoring results. Instead of replacing outdated structures or landscapes in-kind, consider rebuilding with more resilient and climate-neutral alternatives that could be evaluated at the Waterfront Lab.
  
- WR-3. Continue the expansion of the City's network of ferries, while exploring partnerships that would ensure ferry services are improved and made accessible to more New Yorkers. Also, strengthen the City's industrial waterfront through investment in key infrastructure that will support expanded use of waterborne freight movement as an alternative to trucks.
  
- WR-4. Streamline the review and permitting of waterfront projects via a cross-coordinated process to ensure predictability and consistency in waterfront development. This would require specialized expertise in waterfront issues to be embedded in all involved agencies and could be implemented by establishing an inter-agency hub in the Mayor's office.
  
- WR-5. Support the final adoption of the City's Waterfront Revitalization Plan, which also requires formal approval from both the NYS Department of State and the US Department of Commerce.

## **Sustainability and Urban Design**

The City has already begun implementing PlaNYC and has taken steps to promote greener buildings, healthy communities, and a sustainable transportation system. We would like to see these policies continued, monitored, and reimagined with a focus on technology, economic development, and reducing health disparities. Our recommendations include:



- SU-1. Systematically integrate and track sustainability principles into all aspects of city planning and development.
- SU-2. Promote green building technology and utilizing renewable energy sources as well as a robust grid.
- SU-3. Incentivize the use of solar panels, white roofs, and the retrofitting of existing buildings.
- SU-4. Expand efforts on waste minimization and recycling, including commercial and residential composting and construction waste reduction.
- SU-5. Establish land use policies, such as "green zoning" on vacant lots to promote sustainable development and encourage green spaces to be included in all new housing and also encourage new parks, plazas, greenways.
- SU-6. Encourage the development of products from recycled materials as a growth industry.
- SU-7. Promote excellence in urban design to benefit not only affluent communities but all New Yorkers.
- SU-8. Continue the City DOT's Plaza Program and promote an open space strategy that benefits residents' physical health as well as mental and emotional well-being.
- SU-9. Assure our park system is adequately funded for maintenance with skilled labor, particularly in neighborhoods with lower incomes and high unemployment. A well-funded park system is also opportunity for skilled job creation and training.

### **Recovery and Resiliency**

Many parts of the City remain uninhabitable from the effects of Superstorm Sandy. The near-certainty of rising sea levels and more powerful storms magnifies the City's vulnerability to tidal surges and flooding. Crucial decisions have to be made regarding where to rebuild along the shoreline and where to retreat. As with transportation, the likelihood of diminishing future federal aid will mean the City will have to devise its own funding mechanisms for upgrading its storm defenses. Our specific policy goals:

- RR-1. Continue to integrate the recommendations of the *Special Initiative for Rebuilding and Resiliency* into future planning efforts with strong public input.



- RR-2. Further develop emergency response/recovery plans and cost-benefit analyses of long-term resiliency solutions, both hard (surge barriers) and soft (wetlands restoration and enhancement; permeable materials).
- RR-3. Assess the condition of properties in flood hazard areas and the viability of rebuilding. Consider the purchase of the most vulnerable properties or the use of *Transfer of Development Rights* programs to direct development away from Zone A parcels, as well as the potential role of an infrastructure bank in leveraging capital investment advancing public and economic development.
- RR-4. Prevent disinvestment in vulnerable low-income neighborhoods by promoting or providing low-interest loans for property owners to retrofit and flood-proof buildings and properties.
- RR-5. Stress the need for better coordination between government agencies at all levels and with Non-Government Organizations on issues of storm response and hazard mitigation.
- RR-6. Increase public awareness and education about federal assistance programs for property owners impacted by the storm.
- RR-7. Work with surrounding municipalities to assure that comprehensive, regional approach to resiliency is implemented. This is crucial in areas sharing infrastructure with other towns and villages (i.e., LIPA in the Rockaways).

### **Public Health and Nutrition**

The availability of inexpensive, healthy food options is an essential element in not only reducing public health care costs but also in improving educational attainment as a malnourished student is at a significant learning disadvantage. Elimination of “food deserts” and leveraging the City’s food economy should be top priorities for the Administration and can be advanced through the following policy initiatives:

- PH-1. Support the goals and objectives of the *Primer* recently released by the NYC Food Forum for a healthy, sustainable, and just food system, and a vibrant and fair food economy.
- PH-2. Promote and preserve urban agriculture and establishing community gardens through the use of conservation easements.
- PH-3. Integrate urban agriculture, farmers markets, and small food retailers into the city’s FRESH program (Food Retail Expansion to Support Health).





PH-4. Incentivize the use of green roofs and the provision of gardens in building and housing developments.

### **Final Thoughts**

Of course, a key element to the successful implementation of any or all of these policy goals is an inclusionary, neighborhood-based planning process that is transparent and ensures broad participation by the affected communities. Ensuring social equity and protecting the public interest are fundamental tenets of our profession. Local communities know their needs, values, cultures, and priorities and their input should be actively sought before committing to a course of action. We urge you to pursue a transparent and inclusionary approach to decision making that:

- Consciously involves diverse populations in visioning, planning, and policy development, such as participatory budgeting;
- Uses technology and online resources (visioning, mapping, etc.) to enhance public meetings and disseminate information;
- Strengthens coordination among agencies with consistent public outreach processes;
- Professionalizes community boards by bringing a cross-section of experts to each Board and streamlines locally based 197-a plans;
- Empowers community boards by staffing each with full-time, on-site planners.
- Continues to expedite and streamline the ULURP process and other planning processes
- Facilitates a city approval process reflecting the complexity of our environment but also aligns with the various expertise that diverse professions bring to the table;
- Strengthens ties with surrounding jurisdictions to support regional planning.

In closing, the Chapter extends an invitation to work with yourself and key personnel in your administration towards implementation of the policy objectives we have outlined. We would like to establish a strong working relationship and believe our membership has expertise and experience that would serve as a valuable resource to you in achieving your goals. I can be reached at [president@nyplanning.org](mailto:president@nyplanning.org) for further conversation.

Sincerely,

James Rausse, AICP  
President  
American Planning Association  
New York Metro Chapter





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