



Isiah Sheffer

New York's broad new plan promises much, but will it deliver? asks Ethel Sheffer, AICP, a local planning consultant and president of APA's New York Metro Chapter.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg made the news on April 22, Earth Day, when he unveiled his administration's plan for New York City's long-term future. The oddly named PlaNYC is nothing if not comprehensive. It presents a whopping 127 recommendations and objectives dealing with energy, climate change, land use, housing, water and air quality, transportation, infrastructure, and open space. The plan rests on the assumption that New York's recent population growth will continue unabated and that by the year 2030, the city will add another million residents to the current nine million ("the equivalent of adding the entire population of Boston and Miami combined to the five boroughs").

Many of the plan's far-reaching targets will take years to achieve. The goals include reducing the city's global warming emissions by 30 percent by 2030; improving the city's aging transportation network, much of which is at capacity now; and upgrading energy infrastructure and increasing its efficiency. In addition, the plan promises to increase the city's housing stock by at least 265,000 units. As part of that goal, it would preserve existing affordable housing and expand inclusionary zoning programs and financing strategies to create more housing for a range of incomes.

More short range but no less ambitious are the initiatives to green the city's neighborhoods, including planting 15,000 trees a year for a total of one million trees by 2030. The plan would also create at least one public plaza in each of the city's 59 community districts and open all schoolyards to public use. Setting an example, the city pledges to reduce energy consumption in its own buildings immediately.

The plan has been greeted with enthusiasm and excitement by both planners and the media, although the public seems largely indifferent, at least so far. Members of the New York Metro Chapter are thrilled that planning is on the minds of the decision makers, that big and small plans are being made for sustainable growth, and that our dense city can take the lead in meeting and possibly avoiding an environmental meltdown.

But we do have some concerns about the plan: We wonder whether it is wise to assume continued population growth. We think it would be prudent to develop alternative scenarios that consider the potential limits to that growth and to specify what groups are most likely to benefit. We are also concerned about how accountability will be ensured in implementing the plan. We should be working now to develop indicators for monitoring progress and we should do this with broad public input. Clearly, more must be done to extend outreach and to educate the many diverse communities and stakeholders that have not been part of this process so far.

A broad, well-organized political coalition has been formed to support PlaNYC, but there is also vocal opposition to some of its components, notably the proposal for congestion pricing for vehicles entering Manhattan. The \$8-per-day fee on vehicles and \$21-per-day fee for trucks would not only improve traffic flow but would also help to finance transit improvements for outer borough commuters. Elected officials and residents of those boroughs are not convinced, however, and have mounted a major campaign against congestion pricing. The state government in Albany, whose approval would be needed, has so far been silent on this.

Indeed, the political battles have probably just begun, because many of the plan's transportation and energy initiatives require state and regional agreements and partnerships. Will support be forthcoming for the proposed city-state SMART (Sustainable Mobility and Regional Transportation) financing authority, which would pool funds to complete major transportation projects?

Implementing even parts of this plan will be a real test for everyone—politicians, planners, neighborhood leaders, and city and regional officials. If it works, New York could become a model for the future of U.S. cities.

Ethel Sheffer

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