August 3, 2017

RE: New York City Candidate Priorities, Election 2017

Dear Candidates for Mayor, Public Advocate, Comptroller, District Attorney, City Council, and Borough President:

The New York City election cycle is upon us. We commend you for expressing interest and stepping forward as a public servant. Now is the time for current and aspiring elected officials to formulate and clarify their policy positions on a range of issues.

The New York Metro Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) is part of a 35,000-member national organization and represents more than 1,000 planning, urban design, and community development professionals and students. The Chapter hopes to be a resource for candidates on planning-related matters that affect the City both in the immediate future and for the long-term. In advance of the November 2017 elections, this letter highlights the issues and opportunities that we hope candidates will be debating and championing in their respective campaigns. It builds on a similar letter the Chapter authored after the 2013 mayoral election. This letter identifies potential solutions and strategies to effectively plan for a healthy, sustainable, and just city, and we ask for your active support in advancing these initiatives.

For the past three years, the administration of Mayor Bill de Blasio has espoused the vision of One New York: The Plan for a Strong and Just City (OneNYC): growth, equity, sustainability, and resiliency for all New Yorkers. The Chapter strongly agrees with these tenets and encourages all candidates to work toward their continued implementation.

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

- **Economic development.** Promote a diversified economic base through zoning, community investment, public-private partnerships, and workforce and small business retention and development.

- **Housing.** Strengthen efforts to preserve and create permanent affordable housing. Consider the community’s input and the investment in services and infrastructure that are crucial for rezonings.

- **Transportation.** Commit to eliminating all traffic deaths and serious injuries on New York City streets. Prioritize complete streets and advocate for bus, subway, and rail service and capacity improvements.

- **Waterfront revitalization.** Advance sustainable waterfront planning with resilient and climate-neutral design. Strengthen and preserve the City’s industrial waterfront while increasing access and expanding and integrating the ferry network.

- **Sustainability.** Implement the policies and programs that put the City on the path to reduce greenhouse gases 80% by 2050.

- **Urban design.** Uphold urban design principles of place, equity, detail, and comfort. Protect, preserve, and expand public space to benefit residents’ physical and emotional well-being.


- **Public health and nutrition.** Eliminate food deserts and increase the availability of inexpensive, healthy food options for all New Yorkers.
Economic Development
Although the City has largely rebounded from 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 (i.e., 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 work through the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) to strengthen its efforts to:

- Expand job opportunities beyond Manhattan by supporting and expanding the industrial and manufacturing sectors. Investigate zoning programs that incentivize maintaining and creating spaces for light manufacturing such as the Industrial Business Incentive Areas, and mixed-use zoning solutions that recognize the compatibility of light manufacturing and commercial uses.
- Connect job opportunities in the growing technology sector with residents in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods through workforce development and vocational training.
- Encourage greater investment in the outer boroughs by boosting the administrative capacity of non-profit and government entities. Consider emulating Chicago’s “delegate agencies,” which provide funding to neighborhood level non-profits to support small business development.
- As proposed for the East Midtown Sub District, formulate additional development bonus programs to fund infrastructure, transit, and public realm improvements. Identify solutions to the challenges posed by demand for transit as density in East Midtown increases.
- Continue to develop and leverage public-private partnerships, including the formation of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) that enable communities to self-finance physical improvements.
- Experiment with allowing technology to take the place of regulatory processes (e.g., air quality and noise monitors).
- Promote local industry and small business incubator spaces, increase Minority/Women-Owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) contracting and certification, expand efforts in supporting worker self-directed enterprise, and encourage stronger workforce development efforts in low-income communities, like Science, Technology, Engineering, Architecture/Art, and Math (STEAM) education.
- Modernize policies governing street vending so vendors, small business owners, and district management organizations can predict and plan for a diversity of uses on public space. Develop programs to help transition successful street vendors to a storefront model.
- Work to retain existing small business by expanding business owner rights in the commercial lease renewal process, including the rights to legal representation for tenants, minimum leasing, and the first offer of renewal.

Housing
OneNYC and the de Blasio administration’s Housing New York plan describe a housing crisis resulting from stagnating incomes and rapidly escalating housing costs for a large segment of New York City’s population. This crisis is mounting despite interventions. The Chapter supports a vision for safe, affordable housing for all, with the following recommendations to address the growing gap between the supply of and growing demand for affordable units:

- Strengthen efforts to preserve affordable housing and neighborhoods with improved tenant regulations, increased legal services, and criminalizing tenant harassment. Most of the City’s affordable units are in the rent-stabilized stock regulated by New York State. Although it is a challenge to change jurisdiction, New York City, not New York State, should administer the regulations governing the preservation and stabilization of rental housing. Raising rents with vacancies and through Major Capital Improvements (MCIs) should be prohibited, replacing MCIs with tax abatements.
- Allocate additional funds for legal services for low- and moderate-income tenants, as well as owners facing eviction or foreclosure.
- Rezonings should include high opportunity, lower density communities with good transportation access, especially where additional transit capacity is available. Rezoning high opportunity neighborhoods (e.g., Midwood, Park Slope, Forest Hills, Bayside, Queens Village, Chelsea, Clinton, the Upper East Side, Riverdale) allows time to strengthen tenant protections in neighborhoods more vulnerable to displacement and land speculation.
- Ensure that all rezonings involve local community input, with the goal of absorbing population influxes without displacing existing residents. Rezonings should be accompanied by public investment in services and infrastructure.
- Create more housing opportunities by expanding the definition of a dwelling unit, legalizing practices already in use (e.g., co-housing, boarding houses, granny flats). Similarly, end restrictions on the number of non-related occupants, and expand the micro-unit pilot.
- Enforce laws restricting Airbnb and other short-term rental listings to ensure that renters are not crowded out.
- Mandatory inclusionary zoning regulations exist in targeted neighborhoods; mandatory policy should replace voluntary options. Prevent “double/triple dipping” by curtailing the application of subsidies, inclusionary zoning, and 421a benefits to one project, or by requiring a greater number of affordable units if more than one is used.
- Enhance building codes to require increased energy efficiency in new and existing buildings, including on-site energy production where feasible. Help improve consumer awareness of the changing energy environment and of the programs that incentivize energy-efficient retrofits and distributed energy resources.
- Reinvest in Housing Authority buildings using excess land for community-planned, mixed-use development. This development can 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.
- Expand the City’s efforts to develop Community Land Trusts (CLT) by funding the Community Land Trusts Capacity Building Initiative and creating an inventory of City-owned land that would be appropriate for CLT development.

**Transportation**

New York City can proudly boast it has the highest utilization of public transit in the nation; however, aging infrastructure and persistent delays and crowding may soon paralyze the region. In a political climate in which the availability of federal resources is dwindling, the City will need creative strategies to maintain, upgrade, and expand its transportation systems. The Chapter supports the goals of the New York City Department of Transportation’s (NYC DOT) 2016 Strategic Plan: improving traffic safety and public health, expanding travel choices for all New Yorkers, supporting the City’s efforts to fight climate change, doubling cycling, and maintaining our streets and bridges in a state of good repair. Our specific recommendations are as follows:

- Continue implementation of Vision Zero, intensifying the City’s commitment (and funding) to eliminate all traffic deaths and serious injuries on New York City streets. More must be done through street design, enforcement, and technology, including targeting violations that kill (e.g., dangerous driving, speeding, and failure to yield). The New York Police Department (NYPD) must enforce Vision Zero consistently across all precincts.
- Emphasize and support the creation of additional multi-modal corridors (“complete streets”) and essential intermodal infrastructure. Street retrofits should discourage speeding, encourage walking, biking, and transit, and be accessible to all ages and abilities. Evaluate and draw lessons from retrofit efforts that are already underway. Intermodal infrastructure like a new Port Authority Bus Terminal could improve on-street traffic conditions in West Midtown while improving access for thousands who contribute to the City’s economy.
- Prioritize complete streets to mitigate the impacts of the L train shutdown. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) will shut down the L train for at least 18 months in 2019. Help make up for lost subway capacity by creating what advocates have dubbed the “14th Street PeopleWay.” Restrict access for private cars and provide space for bus lanes, protected bike lanes, and wider sidewalks.
- Advocate for subway service and capacity improvements as well as new transit infrastructure. Ensure that New Yorkers have convenient, reliable alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle trips (by private car or by transportation network companies). Specifically:
Fully fund the MTA’s 2019-2023 Capital Plan.

Assure that Phase II of the Second Avenue Subway has full funding support. Maintain the momentum generated by the successful opening of Phase I by expediting the design and completion of stations and track north to 125th Street.

Ensure the resiliency of existing and new transit infrastructure in the face of climate change, superstorms, and sea level rise.

Address subway overcrowding and delays, and improve existing network capacity through expedited communications-based train control (CBTC) on all lines.

Provide real-time information through the installation of countdown clocks on platforms (and above ground at entrances) for the B Division subway lines.

Expand service on Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) and Metro-North stations in isolated, lower income areas by piloting the LIRR “Freedom Ticket” (as announced) and analyzing the potential for expansion throughout Brooklyn and Queens.

Support new transit infrastructure (Brooklyn Queens Connector) and continued progress on current projects (East Side Access).

Create a true Bus Rapid Transit network of dedicated right-of-way and infrastructure beyond the current Select Bus Service (SBS) program. As of June 2017, the City has implemented 13 SBS routes. Identifying new corridors is important, but bus lane enforcement is also critical. Advocate for the expanded use of bus lane cameras, both mounted and on buses, beyond the limitations set by the state. Couple camera enforcement with more robust NYPD patrol. In addition to the SBS network, take steps to increase the reliability and speed of all bus routes. Work with the MTA to redesign indirect routes, implement tap-and-go fare collection and all-door boarding, and give buses transit signal priority.

Continue to build and maintain a safe bicycle transportation network. In the last five years, NYC DOT has expanded and enhanced the on-street bike network by nearly 300 miles. The City must continue prioritizing protected lanes, filling gaps in the protected network, and penalizing those who endanger bicyclists or block lanes. NYC DOT should work with Motivate, the owner and operator of Citi Bike, to determine how best to expand the system in an equitable yet fiscally responsible way.

Support the implementation of the Move NY Fair Plan as it is reintroduced in the State Legislature. Generate revenue to rehabilitate the City's transit system, roads, and bridges by establishing tolls for vehicles entering the Manhattan Central Business District crossing the East River bridges, while lowering tolls on other bridges.

Continue collaborating with federal and state officials to evaluate the potential impacts of autonomous vehicles on city streets. In the near-term, support autonomous vehicle technology as a means to increasing safety and encouraging ride/vehicle sharing. Ensure that this technology enhances mobility rather than diminishing it.

Pursue sustainable transportation strategies, including:

- Develop electric vehicle infrastructure through direct public investment, as well as incentives for private investment in both passenger and commercial vehicles.
- Encourage the development and expansion of vehicle and ride sharing, in order to reduce congestion and private vehicle ownership.
- Use price signals to change travel behavior, including real-time parking pricing.
- Plan ahead for the role of drones in the City’s logistical network, working with the Federal Aviation Administration, including designating “drone highways.”

Work with the Governor and New York’s congressional delegation to assure federal funding for the Gateway Program and for other critical regional infrastructure projects.

Support the Governor in identifying opportunities to add additional runway capacity at New York City’s airports, recognizing that a deficit of capacity poses a critical threat to the economic viability of the City. Support the modernization of air traffic control systems.
Waterfront Revitalization

While the planning and redevelopment of the City’s 520 miles of shoreline has been underway for over 20 years, a new set of challenges and priorities have emerged in the Post-Sandy era. Resilience, reinvestment, public access, and public engagement are essential. The Chapter supports the goals of the Department of City Planning’s (NYC DCP) Vision 2020: New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan. In addition, we recommend the following:

- 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 NYC DCP 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.
- 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.
- Continue the expansion of the City’s network of ferries. Work to integrate the ferry system with the MTA to allow New York’s commuters to access the subway and the ferry system with a single farecard—and ideally allowing passengers to pay a single monthly fee for access to both systems. 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.
- Develop goals for industrial retention on the waterfront and expand MX Zoning districts that combine industrial, residential, and commercial uses. Develop a pilot program to implement a vertical mixed-use zone that requires manufacturing on the ground floor of new development, as recommended in the New York City Council’s Engines of Opportunity report.
- 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.
- Continue efforts to increase access to the waterfront, especially along the Newtown Creek and Gowanus Canal Superfund sites, where bold visions are possible.

Sustainability

In 2015, the City released OneNYC, the long-term planning roadmap that seeks to “preserve and enhance New York City’s role as a global city.” With this platform, which is updated every four years, the City seeks to address long-term sustainability challenges with policies and programs that address climate change mitigation and adaptation, healthy and just communities, and economic competitiveness. We support these initiatives, and wish to see them enhanced with legislative changes and funding allocations that will make them even more effective. More specifically, we wish to see the following:

- Systematically integrate sustainability principles into all aspects of city planning, with specific reporting requirements for large development projects.
- Follow through on New York City’s Roadmap to 80 x 50 to put the City on the path to reduce greenhouse gases 80% by 2050 (80 x 50).
- Invest in large-scale renewable energy and energy storage projects to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon and resilient electric grid.
- Promote clean, distributed energy resources and take the necessary steps to realize the City’s goals of 1,000 MW of solar capacity and 100 MW of energy storage by 2030.
- Mandate building energy efficiency requirements in new construction and existing buildings, in alignment with 80 x 50.
• Prepare New York City’s workforce for a low-carbon economy, with access to jobs at various skill and education levels.
• Continue to address environmental justice issues including but not limited to air quality, affordability, and heat risk through regulation and infrastructure investments that protect the City’s most vulnerable populations.
• Expand programs to encourage and incentivize waste minimization, recycling, and composting.
• Reduce regulatory barriers and incentivize the use of smart, low-carbon, and resilient building technologies such as real-time energy meters, heat pumps, and battery electric storage.
• Implement land use and zoning policies that promote sustainable development, specifically green spaces within residential developments as well as public parks, plazas, and greenways.
• Support the Neighborhood Innovation Labs and the “smart city” economic ecosystem at large.
• Lobby federal and state agencies and legislative bodies on behalf of New York City’s constituents to reduce emissions in the power and transportation sectors.

Urban Design
One of the Chapter’s core values is the livability of New York City’s neighborhoods and the quality of the urban design of its public realm. The public realm is the complete social and public experience of moving through a city. It entails how elements like streets, sidewalks, shops, facades, and buildings knit together to create the whole urban experience. The public realm frames movement of people through the City as well as a respite for leisure and recreation throughout the five boroughs.

The next administration will have the continued privilege and responsibility of advancing good urban design in our City. As a base, we would like to see the administration continue to uphold the urban design principles outlined by the NYC DCP:

1. Place: Good urban design both creates and reinforces a sense of place
2. Equity: Good urban design is open and accessible to everyone
3. Detail: Good urban design pays attention to the details
4. Comfort: Good urban design makes people feel good

More specifically, we have the following recommendations:

• Promote excellence in urban design to benefit not only affluent communities but all New Yorkers. Ensure that rigorous and equitable urban design principles are a part of any rezoning initiative, particularly rezonings that target low-income communities and communities of color.
• Continue NYC DOT’s Plaza Program and promote an open space strategy that benefits residents’ physical health as well as mental and emotional well-being.
• Ensure our park system is adequately funded for improvements and maintenance by skilled labor, particularly in neighborhoods with lower incomes and high unemployment.
• Protect and preserve public spaces that may be at risk. For example, we strongly opposed statements made in the summer of 2015 by then Police Commissioner Bill Bratton to shut down the plazas in Times Square. The Chapter supports the ideas set out in the inter-organizational letter sent to Mayor de Blasio in January 2017 requesting improvements to public space for civic engagement and dialogue.
• Continue highly successful street design initiatives by supporting Vision Zero and 80 x 50 goals.
• Continue design excellence programs and initiatives through the Public Design Commission and the Department of Design and Construction (DDC).
• Establish an Office of Long-Term Planning that engages in comprehensive, long-range planning for the City’s future using inclusive and rigorous planning methodologies and processes. Additionally, we would like to see this Office equipped with the proper authority to implement, enforce and deliver on the policy agenda set forth in OneNYC.
Recovery and Resiliency
More powerful, frequent storms like Superstorm Sandy have magnified 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 federal aid means that the City will have to devise its own funding mechanisms for upgrading its storm defenses and addressing sea level rise. Our specific policy goals include the following:

- Continue to integrate the recommendations of the Special Initiative for Rebuilding and Resiliency into future planning efforts with strong public input.
- 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).
- 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 (TDR) programs to direct development away from Zone A parcels, as well as the potential of an infrastructure bank to leverage capital investment.
- 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.
- Stress the need for better coordination between government agencies at all levels and with non-governmental organizations on issues of storm response and hazard mitigation.
- Increase public awareness about federal assistance programs for property owners.
- Work with surrounding municipalities to assure that a comprehensive, regional approach to resiliency is implemented. This is crucial in areas sharing infrastructure with other towns and villages (i.e., Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) in the Rockaways).
- Expand on Flood Hazard Zoning to enable implementation of not only hard but soft resiliency solutions, including “retreat.” This may include bonuses and/or TDR programs.
- Modernize the grid to promote cheap, reliable, and resilient access to renewable energy sources.
- Integrate local input into resiliency planning for all stages.

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. As such, the Chapter is currently collaborating with the American Public Health Association (APHA) on a Plan4Health project, which is building local capacity to address population health goals and promote the inclusion of health in non-traditional sectors. Elimination of food deserts and leveraging the City’s food economy should be top priorities and can be advanced through the following policy initiatives:

- Support the goals and objectives of the NYC Food Forum’s Food Primer for a healthy, sustainable, and just food system, and a vibrant and fair food economy.
- Promote and preserve urban agriculture and establish community gardens through conservation easements.
- Integrate urban agriculture, farmers’ markets, and small food retailers into the City’s Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH) program.
- Incentivize the use of green roofs and the provision of gardens in new development.
- Focus on food and food education reform in schools.
- Continue encouraging behavioral incentives against sugary drinks and processed foods, and advocate for rules about disclosure of calories, fats, and sugars at food establishments.
- Consider criminal justice and police accountability a public health issue. Safety, violence, and incarceration impact minority communities and their economic/health outcomes.
- Continue to fund remediation including lead & asbestos abatement and reductions in vehicle emissions (especially heavy vehicles).
Final Thoughts
A key element to the successful implementation 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 all candidates 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 civic technology and online resources (visioning, mapping, etc.) to open and speed up planning and development processes;
- Strengthens coordination among agencies with consistent public outreach processes;
- Professionalizes community boards by bringing a cross-section of experts to each board and streamlining locally based 197-a plans;
- Empowers community boards by staffing each with full-time, on-site planners;
- Continues to expedite and streamline the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) process and other planning processes;
- Facilitates an approval process that reflects the complexity of our environment but also aligns with the various expertise that diverse professions bring to the table; and
- Strengthens ties with surrounding jurisdictions to support regional planning.

In closing, the Chapter extends an invitation to work with all New York City candidates towards implementation of the policy objectives we have outlined. Our membership has expertise and experience that would serve as a valuable resource as candidates articulate their priorities and campaign platforms. Chapter representatives can be reached at communications@nyplanning.org and intergovernmental@nyplanning.org for further conversation. More information about the Chapter can be found at http://www.nyplanning.org/

Sincerely,

Executive Committee
New York Metro Chapter
American Planning Association