

Concrete, Rent, Environment

“As a material that creates the majority of the world’s bridges, roads, dams, and construction, concrete releases an extreme amount CO₂ each year. It’s the highest consumed product on earth besides water. Until the overall emissions are cut worldwide, the environment will continue to be polluted with over 4 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide annually due to this industry.”¹

While all agree to protect our future by cutting down on greenhouse gases. The question is just how much are we willing to give up. Cement manufacturing accounts for 8% of the world’s CO₂ emissions. Concrete, which is made out of cement, is the most widely used substance on Earth -- behind only water; the third largest consumer of energy; and the second largest emitter of CO₂ when looking at industrial players alone.²

As individuals, it is great to recycle, compost, bike or drive hybrid / EV. Keep that up, but now it is time for industry, government, and transportation networks to step up, too. We need big changes faster. There is no time to wait.

For one, there is a good reason NYC government to take a four year *pause* and halt new building of what is now called “affordable” housing. Most will say, but we need housing. I disagree - what we need is housing that is affordable. We need to strengthen communities not rip them apart. For the past decade, we have watched our communities die all while the government failed to raise their quality of life with good housing. Sustainability keeps people in their homes near friends and family; not moved into high risers and watching old building knocked down and have to move to a new area. Fix what is broke before you build more.

The goal of helping those in need should be a slow drive. When 11 of the 12 Community Boards in the Bronx are rated between 45 to 55 percent rent burdened, with the last one at 40%, this is a signal. Moreover, this is not specific to the Bronx, the whole City is at 44%. Frankly, this is an unacceptable position and is predictive of terrible problems to come. One could posit that it would cost less money for the city to help the rent burdened pay their rent in some temporary fashion, than it is to subsidize developers to build housing, pay for the cost of more sewers, school seats, trains, buses, etc.

Second, for those who want to move, many offices are now vacant due to COVID as more employees can work at home. While most of these may be in Manhattan, there are many other empty office buildings throughout the city. The retrofits will not involve concrete or cement, for the most part – they just need to be renovated.

Finally, all new or reconstruction on trails, greenways, or paths should be on porous asphalt. Not concrete or the standard asphalt. There are many reasons that the City does not have a policy for porous asphalt, although no one really knows why. Porous asphalt is not too hard to clean. Transportation Alternatives do not prefer regular asphalt. Moreover, porous asphalt is green infrastructure as it captures the rain. It is not more expensive, today it costs more because no one is using it. Not only will this eliminate concrete, but it will also hold water.

All offer us a healthier and better life with clean air, more space, happy families, and less CO₂.

Opinion by Karen Argenti, February 19, 2023

¹ “Cement And Concrete: The Environmental Impact”, Princeton Student Climate Initiative, November 3, 2020. Contributor: Keegan Ramsden. <https://psci.princeton.edu/tips/2020/11/3/cement-and-concrete-the-environmental-impact>

² “Concrete is Worse for the Climate than Flying. Why Aren’t More People talking about it?”, June 24, 2022. Inside Climate News. https://insideclimatenews.org/todaysclimate/concrete-is-worse-for-the-climate-than-flying-why-arent-more-people-talking-about-it/?gclid=Cj0KCCQjAt66eBhCnARIsAKf3ZNGJVHq9LEHaj7sLyDycfl.dpzi8k4yXqym35flxf4gbR74rQHxot-VUaAitMEALw_wCB