



City of Yes for Housing Opportunity  
Testimony by The City Club of New York  
Delivered by Layla Law-Gisiko, President.  
July 10, 2024

Good morning, Director Garodnick, Commissioners of the City Planning Commission,

My name is Layla Law-Gisiko, I'm the president of The City Club of New York. The City Club of New York is a civic organization founded in 1892 and dedicated to good governance and sound urbanism.

While the intent of "City of Yes for Housing Opportunity" to increase housing is commendable, the proposal as it stands fails to meet the urgent needs of our city, particularly in terms of affordable housing.

"City of Yes for Housing Opportunity" may be a housing proposal, but it is not an affordable housing proposal. Many wrongly assume that increasing housing supply will automatically result in more affordable housing. This is a dangerous misconception. Housing economics are very complex. Research shows that solely relying on the market and failing to address the various sub-markets will predictably fail to address affordable housing needs. Benefits for the wealthy do not trickle down to everyone else in unregulated housing markets for the same reason the gourmet food store does not solve hunger.



Other jurisdictions have recognized this and mandate affordable housing without relying on zoning incentives. New York must mandate affordable housing.

This proposal threatens to reduce the quality of housing. By allowing for reduced standards in housing quality, such as smaller setbacks and no minimum unit sizes, we risk creating substandard living conditions. Jacob Riis, a historical advocate for improved living conditions, would be deeply disappointed to see a rollback in the standards he fought so hard to raise.

The initiative fails to assess the environmental impact of new housing developments. There is no planning for the additional infrastructure needed to support these developments, such as hospital beds, school seats, parks and other essential services. This oversight will lead to strained resources and diminished quality of life for existing residents, as we already see in midtown Manhattan with a drastic shortage of hospital beds.

The transfer of development rights from landmarks also raises significant concerns. This mechanism could result in the creation of disproportionately large towers. We know what happens with unregulated lot assemblage. We've seen the damage caused by supertall towers. Mega-large apartments for the super-wealthy international real estate collector. Certainly not housing for the middle-class. These "Frankenstein" buildings erode our urban fabric, often at the expense of existing middle-income housing.

We are faced with a proposal that aims high but falls short. It seeks to increase housing but neglects affordability and quality. The goal is laudable but the policy will inevitably collapse under its own contradictions. We must demand mandatory affordable housing provisions, protect our housing standards, ensure local oversight, and plan for the necessary community infrastructure. The City Club opposes this proposal as drafted. Instead, we urge you to reconsider the text and strive for zoning changes that truly serve all New Yorkers.



And I want to quickly add that saying no is not a punishing reflection on the department, or an act of hostility. Please see it as a civic act. Part of participatory democracy. A firm nudge for the commission to improve the text. Please show us that our voices matter.

Layla Law-Gisiko, President  
The City Club of New York