



## THE CITY CLUB OF NEW YORK

### Planning One Great City for All

The City Club of New York joins Mayor de Blasio in his concern for ensuring equity in delivering municipal investments and services to the City. In support of that goal, we suggest a number of reforms that we feel will help in providing fair, equitable and efficiently delivered urban planning, preservation and development.

Under the past administration, much of the City has been transformed and many of us are better for it. But the achievements have not served us all equally. We have planned for the City with a view from City Hall, picking and choosing marketable winners and leaving many of our communities behind. We should recognize and maintain many of the improvements to our parks and streets, and should see to completion plans for improving the environment and protecting us from climate change – but in doing so, should partner with communities. In order to serve the entire City, we must not plan exclusively from the center, but from many levels and points of view: the neighborhood, the community district, the borough, the city and the region.

If we do that, if we plan comprehensively and responsively at each level of concern, we will be able to understand what is equitable and responsible, and how proposals nest into a consistent image of the City's future.

Our focus in this discussion is in two directions; toward improving **how** we plan, preserve and develop that future and towards determining **what** we plan.

### What to do

The City continues to face a severe shortage in affordable housing, good jobs and convenient access to transportation. We have failed to fairly distribute improvements to the environment, investments in infrastructure and efforts to enhance and preserve our communities and our industry. We should start with those most neglected:

#### At a Neighborhood Level

We need to do hundreds of things at a neighborhood scale rather than a few big projects at large scale. We all understand the administrative ease of big projects and their ribbon-cutting benefits, but real benefits come from improving life where people live. To that end, we should,

- Invest in neighborhood “main street” paving and landscaping, to incentivize development through focused infrastructure improvements
- Promote and expand the DOT Plaza program with enhanced support for non-profit sponsors
- Plan and pre-approve small projects on publicly owned or acquired land so as to encourage small local developers to respond to local needs and account for the unique features and historic character of each neighborhood.

- Create neighborhood outreach mechanisms for participation in physical planning and for considering the safety and social services needed to sustain neighborhood preservation and growth.

#### At a Community District Level

Although Community Districts have no relation with any other jurisdiction, they are the smallest administrative designation for planning – each containing the population of a small to medium sized US city. As such, each Community District should have a plan of its own. At this scale we should:

- Create district or “town” plans for community improvement and for the coordination of local community preservation and development.
- Incorporate into the town plan the minimum percentage of affordable housing units and of permanent supportive housing for the homeless stipulated by the overall city plan.
- Incorporate into plans for housing a concomitant plan for coordinated social service, and emergency response
- Formulate district wide proposals for workspace and manufacturing space.
- Equitably distribute infrastructure improvements that enhance opportunities for both new market and affordable housing
- Plan for enhanced and concentrated commercial and industrial centers within each district

#### At a Borough Level

Our boroughs are larger than most cities in the country and need to be considered as such, with:

- New transit routes along up-zoned transit corridors providing dependable access across the boroughs as well as to Manhattan
- A comprehensive borough-wide development plan that identifies economic development priorities, potential large-scale development sites, and infrastructure needs.
- Coordination that ensures that MTA routes, DOT improvements, DoB regulations, EPA investments, Parks and EDC developments are budgeted fairly and are responsive to the borough capital and operating plans
- Preservation plans for historic building and neighborhoods, decentralized to assure outer borough focus and centralized at the borough level to assure wider priorities and integration with borough-wide planning
- City-owned building maintenance and improvements (anyone seen the Brooklyn Municipal building lately?)

#### At a City Level

The primary planning considerations at a city level should be policy, regulations, coordination and budgeting. As such, we should

- Coordinate a neighborhood, district and borough-wide process of comprehensive planning as an update to the 1969 Plan for the City of New York.
- Develop fairly distributed citywide programs to build, preserve and expand access to affordable housing through changes in occupancy regulations, and infill housing.
- Create a citywide program for the retention and development of manufacturing and craft space with incentives for green and dense/ multi-story manufacturing, active use requirements for unimproved property and required manufacturing uses in proposed mixed-use zones.
- Coordinate MTA transit with planning goals that ensure access from and to the active edges of the City

- Accelerate green building plans that diminish sewer outflows into our waters and rebuild our aging infrastructure to resist rising tides and storm surge
- Distribute fairly the impacts of negative but essential sites for municipal services

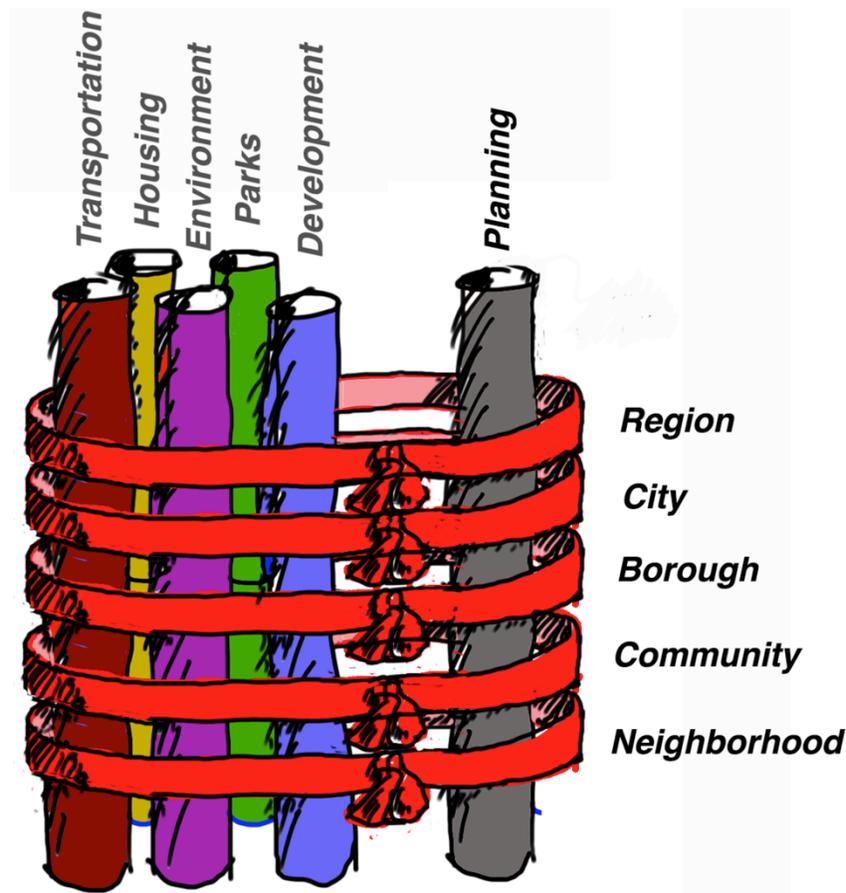
At a Regional Level

Major long-range planning issues remain outstanding and overlooked as we consider growth and security for the City. We need to:

- Actively plan, promote and integrate future transit, transportation, water resource and waste management planning into city programs.
- Initiate a new regional planning process to account for climate changes, which will have an impact not only on every waters edge and low-lying area, but also on our water shed in the Catskills.

**How to do it**

To be able to plan both for a city’s overall future and for neighborhood needs at the same time requires a redistribution of talent, effort and funds. It needs a change of attitude and perspective. It needs continual and obsessive coordination among all the City agencies. And to do that, we need to organize comprehensively, placing planning at the center of the effort – and tying to the planning process the budgeting for capital investments.



Agency Coordination

Every City agency has a planning arm that serves the agency but coordinates minimally with other agencies. We need to devise a single forum in which they can act together. There is no consistency in how agencies consider or reflect borough, district or neighborhood priorities. Some, like the Police Department have strong precinct identity but no borough or citywide

coordination of community policing. Others like the Parks and DOT coordinate at a borough level but infrequently in the districts or neighborhoods. HPD and Landmarks are Manhattan based. And the Department of City Planning staff is heavily centralized with zoning the only neighborhood outreach. Most project planning initiatives are devised and initiated by private developers and little if any comprehensive planning is conducted at all. That needs to change.

### Plan First

Planning is the conceptual framework for policy and development, not merely a background report for zoning. To ensure a coordinated and comprehensive planning agenda, DCP must resume its role as the coordinating entity among all planning functions and take responsibility for Capital Review and the Long Term Planning Office.

### The Department of City Planning

The central office of DCP should operate as a flexible consulting team, tackling strategic plan initiatives, such as regional plans, major projects and zoning text revisions. Borough offices, staffed by senior personnel, would take on the role of “town planner” for their respective community districts. Planning staff would be directly assigned to Community Districts to ensure input and interagency coordination

### Community Boards

The creation of the Community District and the boards that govern them was intended to support what were then called “little city halls”; to ensure that there was participation by and a response to local communities. But the Community Boards have not been funded, staffed or chosen well enough to make their roles effective. Thus, even they, in this very large and complicated city bureaucracy, have not been responsive to the neighborhoods they serve. We must increase their resources with DCP staff and research and carefully select the members so that they are individually more representative of their communities and together more able to exercise real power instead of the power of simply being a nuisance.

### The Process

Finally, the arcane and unique to the City, Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) and the City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) should be adjusted so that their cost and impact on development is substantially reduced. ULURP should be conducted to involve other interested parties in the shaping of the application, seeking consensus before it is certified for a shorter, less contentious public review. The planning process should reflect citywide comprehensive planning decisions. It should achieve agreement on the nature and scale of change at its inception and the range of expectations narrowed, allowing more projects to be approved as-of-right or administratively. The environmental review (CEQR) is presently so extensive and costly that it precludes any meaningful input after it is written. The scoping document should be limited to identifying the most significant impacts, and rather than comprehensive disclosure, presented as alternatives, reasonable ways of achieving project goals.

## **What next?**

It is our hope that this paper sparks conversation and consideration on the part of the new administration to advance proposals suggested and to reform the planning organization and process to get them done.

The City Club of New York stands ready to provide support and further information toward that end. Details beyond this brief summary are readily available.