

THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY

November 16, 2015

STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY AT THE MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING THE DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING'S ZONING FOR QUALITY AND AFFORDABILITY PROPOSAL

Good evening Borough President Brewer. I am Andrea Goldwyn speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Conservancy is a private, independent, not-for-profit organization founded in 1973. Our mission is to preserve and protect historic resources throughout New York. We will be speaking on the Zoning for Quality and Affordability proposal.

When the Department of City Planning issued ZQA, we had many questions: about the justification for the proposal, its impact on historic districts, the paucity of information, and the lightning quick timing of public review for this vast, City-wide plan. We thank Chair Weisbrod and his staff for speaking to us, issuing community profiles, and providing community briefings, but frankly, we are still dismayed by both the substance of ZQA and this review process.

This is a massive plan with a one-size-fits-all approach for each of New York's unique communities. It does not provide any guarantee for an increase in affordable housing, but will encourage market rate units. There is no strong rationale for alterations to Quality Housing regulations. As these are both significant sets of changes that will be realized very differently across the City, it's not clear why they are being forced together in one proposal. Before ZQA goes any further, there needs to be an analysis of the expected numbers of new market rate units, new affordable units, and the numbers of existing stabilized and affordable units that could be lost to demolition.

This rezoning overturns basic planning principles. Communities with contextual zoning worked over years to ensure that the plans, tailored to their neighborhoods, garnered consensus, often through compromise. Homeowners thought that they had certainty in terms of future development on their blocks. ZQA threatens all of that work, and abandons the agreements that they forged with the City. Light and air used to be valued. Rear yards provided open space and grass coverage helped alleviate stormwater runoff. Now they are set to be filled in so developers can maximize FAR. ZQA reverses the Sliver Law and erases the distinction between narrow and wide streets. The system of FAR limits has always been a cap; under ZQA it will be an entitlement.

The DEIS states that this proposal will have no impact on historic resources since it is not expected to induce development, but the whole intent of the plan is to increase development. ZQA will affect City-designated historic districts, State and National Registers of Historic Districts, areas under study for designation, and districts eligible for State and National Registers listing. It will put undue pressure on the Landmarks Commission to approve out of scale additions and new construction in historic districts with contextual zoning. This would negate the protections of landmark designation, and add pressure to slow down future designations.

We are concerned that that the changes to Quality Housing regulations will not increase quality as much as just allow for taller buildings. Construction methods evolve, so it's impractical to alter zoning for decades

based on one technique (block-and-plank) likely to be replaced in coming years. And the focus on higher ground floor heights seems disproportionate to all of the other factors that contribute to a building's success.

Finally, why is ZQA receiving less than the full ULURP review that can be required for the rezoning a neighborhood or even one lot, and why is each Community Board required to rush through its evaluation in a few weeks, when a typical 197A plan entails dozens of meetings, often over several years? If this process is not a standard ULURP, we ask the Borough Presidents and the City Council to set a longer, more appropriate time frame for review.

Thank you for the opportunity to express The Landmarks Conservancy's views.