

Dear friends,

Not gonna lie, I wish I lived in less interesting times. I'm finding a lot of hope in Mamdani's candidacy. When the National Guard is sent to NYC, he's who I want in the Mayor's office. I'm finding hope in Tank Woman. My big fantasy right now is an army of perimenopausal women in polka dot dresses driving ICE out of NYC with our giant no-nonsense handbags full of ibuprofen, snacks, tissues, and USB-powered personal fans.

And I'm finding hope in us—the folks who are standing together against ICE and the National Guard and fascism and xenophobia.

This fall's email is less comprehensive than I would have liked. But one thing middle age has taught me is not to let the perfect be the enemy of the good. I spent a lot of time this fall on the thing I thought was most confusing—the affordable housing ballot measures. Most of the other races were won or lost in June, and you already know what to do.

As usual, a hat tip to New Kings Democrats. [You can find their voter guide here.](#)

As you'll see, I didn't get to judges on this one. NKD sent me to [this site for judicial candidate evaluations](#), which I found helpful.

Affordable Housing: Ballot Measures 2-5

I talked to two affordable housing experts about these initiatives: Rachel Fee, Executive Director at the New York Housing Conference, and Steven Herrick, Executive Director of the Cooper Square Committee. I'll add that I organized with Steve for 12 years in the '00s and '10's, and I trust him deeply on this subject.

TL;DR: Vote yes on all four.

Together, these proposals increase capacity for truly affordable housing and supportive housing while maintaining community input and checks on for-profit real estate developers. It removes some of the biggest barriers to a city regular people can afford to live in.

Summary

Prop 2: Creates a **fast-track zoning process** for **large** affordable housing proposals from **non-profit developers**. It allows non-profit developers to skip the 7-10 year land use review process, giving them an alternate 4-month review process. This would apply city-wide.

It also creates a fast track process for **affordable housing in the 12 NYC districts with the least affordable housing**. This is designed to circumvent the vetos of the council members in the 12 most recalcitrant districts. These projects can also access the fast-track zoning if the developer is a non-profit.

Neither fast track applies to for-profit developers who include faux-affordable housing within market rate projects.

Prop 3: Creates a fast-track process for **smaller** affordable and supportive housing proposals from non-profit developers.

Prop 4: Creates an appeals board for these processes. It consists of the Mayor, the City Council Speaker, and the Borough President.

Prop 5: Unifies the City map process to streamline affordable housing (and other housing) projects.

Jen's "I'm Too Busy To Understand This" Explainer on Affordable Housing

If you want to really understand the nitty-gritty here, [read this article by the Furman Center](#). It's a little dry and technical. If you prefer the Jen touch, here's my explainer, which includes all the questions I had before I did my research:

Didn't these come out of the Adams administration? We hate that guy.

Not exactly. They came out of Open New York's [City of Yes](#) campaign. Adams appointed the folks who decided it should go on the ballot, but it was affordable housing advocates who shaped the measures.

Ok, but the City Council opposes it. That seems sus.

The City Council loved these proposals until a provision was added to remove the effective veto City Council members have over housing development projects in their districts (called "member deference").

This provision is an important counterweight to a handful of Council members who have been using that veto to block affordable housing for decades.

Some progressive Council members oppose it because it will remove their ability to block projects that are not appropriate for their neighborhoods. See below for more info on why I don't think that's the problem they think it is.

Won't this reduce community input?

Depends what you mean. If you mean “won't this reduce my district's ability to stonewall affordable housing,” then yes.

Prop 2 actually **increases legit community input**. A lot of affordable projects never even make it into public view because the council member signaled they would veto them. Without the expedited zoning process in Prop 2, the proposal process can take 7-10 years and is very costly. Nonprofit developers are unlikely to start the process if the council member has signaled they will veto it. Community members don't even know about those proposals, much less get the chance to have input.

Hmmmm, ok, but don't unions oppose it too?

Yup. [Some do](#). There's a lot in that article that's misleading or just not true, but it will give you the union talking points. Unions are claiming that member deference is what allows council members to get concessions from developers. But this is misleading, because as I said above, this fast track only applies to non-profit developers and the 12 districts with the least affordable housing. Those are not the developers who need to have concessions wrested from them.

I'm still suspicious of anything that makes things easier for real estate developers.

Legit. Those people suck. But remember—these three fast tracks don't apply to any for-profit real estate developers. It primarily applies to HDFCs. ([What's an HDFC?](#)) HDFCs are income-restricted, and most of those buildings are 100% affordable housing. These are not the developers who build a 200 unit building with 180 luxury units that inflate the market rate of the area, and 20 “below market” units that regular people still can't afford. This fast track only applies to developers who don't have a profit motive, and to developers building in the 12 districts most resistant to public housing. You can look at the [maps from the Furman Center](#) if you want to know where they are.

Buuuuut....what if a non-profit proposes something truly terrible?

Well, there are already a bunch of safeguards against, for instance, adult supportive housing being within a certain distance of a school. Those safeguards don't change. But if something truly terrible gets through, Prop 4 creates an appeals board. The appeals board consists of the Mayor, the Council Speaker, and the Borough President. The progressive Council members who are afraid of inappropriate proposals have this as a backstop.

What else should I know about in these proposals?

Fast Track Zoning: The fast track doesn't just eliminate member deference. It speeds up the entire process. Right now, non-profit developers need to go through an Urban Land Use Review Process (ULURP) to change zoning to build affordable housing. That process can take 7-10 years. During that time, market and other conditions can change in ways that send non-profit developers back to the drawing board. And even if nothing goes wrong, folks need that housing now! Like, RIGHT NOW.

Prop 2 lets non-profit developers bypass that process, potentially getting approval in a matter of months, not years.

ELURP: Prop 3 provides for an Expedited Land Use Review Process (ELURP) instead of a ULURP for modest-sized projects. Prop 2 is for projects like Atlantic Yards that put hundreds of units on land that hadn't had any. Prop 3 is for projects that offer much more modest increases occupancy. This might be a project to convert a rental building to a supportive housing building, for instance. Right now, those projects also have to go through a 7-10 year ULURP process. Prop 3 reduces that time significantly while still providing for careful consideration of the project.

Appeals Board: Prop 4 provides for an appeals board consisting of the Mayor, the City Council Speaker, and the Borough President. By majority vote, they can overturn a fast-track decision. This brings the Council back into the process, and the Borough President can counterbalance any executive/legislative power struggles that might come up between the other two members.

Unified maps: Right now, anyone trying to build housing has to wade through over 8000 paper maps stored in 5 different Borough President offices. Prop 5 would create a unified digital map.

What about Props 1 and 6???

Prop 1: I'm voting yes. My yes vote is purely pragmatic. The Olympic Training Center in the Adirondacks has already done a bunch of development that is out of compliance with Forever Wild. This amendment brings it into compliance through a land swap. Part of me wants to vote no because I don't want to open back doors to Forever Wild. But the land swap is 323 acres of Training Center land for 2500 acres of land somewhere else (TBD if the amendment passes). That feels like a sufficient disincentive to this particular back door, and I think it's also dangerous to have land just left out of compliance indefinitely.

Prop 6: your mileage may vary. Having City elections on odd-numbered years means that City issues and candidates have the stage to themselves. It means grassroots voter mobilization organizations don't have to spread themselves so thin. It's hard enough to focus voters on local issues when we aren't also working on state and national issues.

On the other hand, NKD makes a solid, data-based argument for voting yes:

"Cities like Los Angeles, Baltimore, and Phoenix experienced 20-60% increases after shifting their election dates. In fact, more people vote at the bottom of a national election's ballot than vote at the top of a local-only ballot.

It will also promote a more inclusive and representative electorate. Research in California on school board elections found that the share of minority voters, young voters, and renters all increase during even years. Additionally, moving NYC elections to even-numbered years would ensure the Help America Vote Act, which provides laws for ballot access, also applies to city elections."

Alright my friends. As usual, I adore you for giving a shit. I'll see you on the barricades with my practical mom bag full of antifascist wet wipes.

With love and navy blue polka dot solidarity,

Jen