



Testimony for the New York City Council's Zoning Committee on the City Of Yes

I'm John Mudd, the Executive Director of Midtown South Community Council, and I've been living in Midtown since 84. The Council has been around just as long. We work with agencies, elected officials, nonprofits, activists, and community, church, and other groups regarding our basic human needs of health, housing, and food.

The housing crisis is decades old and we haven't made any real attempts to resolved it. Our infrastructure is archaic, agencies of oversight understaffed, and response is at a snails pace. Things haven't changed. The City's development policies are largely to blame for the burdening rents, poor health, widening disparity, and increasing homelessness.

Rather than produce the kinds of housing needed, protect our rent controlled and stabilized stock, and bring the 64,000 warehoused apartments onto the market, we're making deals with developers and securing their investments by ensuring development friendly folks are in office, running the Rent Guidelines Board, and sitting on the Community Boards to manufacture consent for their communities.

Case in point, four members of Open New York, a nonprofit funded by Billionaire and co-founder of Facebook Dustin Moskovitz with a purpose to influence elections and develop, have seats on CB4, and on other boards around the city. This "nonprofit" is dubiously appealing for "affordable" housing and is wedded to the "YIMBY" (Yes In My Back Yard) movement—exists a super pac called Abundant NY. And they are primed to influence elections by funding their political proxies to lift the zoning restraints and simplistically solve the "New York's housing shortage by increasing the rate of housing production." [Click here for more information.](#)

You will also find Open New York folks providing several testimonials for the City Council's Subcommittee on The City Of Yes here today, October 22, 2024.

Agency officials are not protected from stupidity, ideology, or corporate capture. For HPD Commissioner Carrion to laud his agency's "robust partnership" with private industry is appalling, particularly when they have been responsible for pushing extractive plans responsible for our health, food, housing crises.

Our housing policies in general, as with this City Of Yes proposal, serves the developers best interest, and does very little to ease or end the homelessness and the housing crisis (that is a crisis of affordability).

The proponents scream housing crisis often enough and use the term '[affordable housing](#),' which has been bastardized, overused, and misused to serve the real estate industry's marketing goals to coax the public into accepting their schemes.

Land-use and wealth far outweighs public concerns. Rather than wrangle the developer's grips from their stranglehold on this City's land-use and protect our livable, breathable, and healing spaces to give people security and comfort; we're given the City Of Yes, an opportunity for the developers to acquire and commoditize more valuable public space; thereby supercharging the housing crisis.

The plan disguises tax giveaways as incentives, uses a repackaged problematic 421A tax giveaway and a problematic AMI to determine what's affordable; It continues using a dysfunctional voucher system to subsidize landlords, and it has no mandates for the right to housing.—See Samuel Stein, Community Service Society, Housing Policy Analyst, [421A discussion here](#) and [video here](#).

The plan does not account or resolve a variety of infrastructure problems. Many agreed with Councilman Robert Holden's statement, that a proposal "With no infrastructure upgrade plans—such as aging electric grids, deteriorating roads, overwhelmed sewer systems, and under-resourced schools—and recent storms killing people in basement apartments, the last thing we should be doing is pushing forward a rushed plan that most community boards and countless civic associations oppose."

When budgeting a startup business you would consider all the infrastructure needs such as sewers, gas, electric, garbage, transit, and more to run that business inefficiently. Society needs as much consideration. This plan leaves it to the individual and or the municipality to deal with while the developer runs off with the money.

The City Of Yes, with unanswered questions, packaged and marketed as an answer to our housing crisis, is but another wealth extractive plan, that takes advantage during a moment of need—a disaster capitalist approach. The build it and let the free market fix it gimmick was disproven a long time ago. The continual commoditizing of homes will always have the investor looking for more profits at the expense of the renter. This build mentality and let the market resolve the affordable crisis is likely a purposely ignorant ideology to continue extracting wealth from a collapsing economy.

In no way does privatization serve the public. But it gives them power to cost us out of living. Corporate self interest and indifference toward the public is undeniable.

As we speak Related is working to acquire the largest stock of low income housing this nation has produced. This developer, with some of our elected officials support, is planning to end public housing and demolish approximately 4,500 people out of their homes in Chelsea to steal the land beneath them.

Our history of development is our crystal ball, and you don't have to go very far to see our future, starting "with former NYC Mayor Bloomberg's 2008 rezoning failure of Midtown, which allowed the over-saturation of hotels, squashed tenement buildings, and worsened the homeless and housing crisis."

Other examples...

The Hudson Yards development plan "didn't go too well, not from the public's perspective: The shopping mall project hit hurdles commonly associated with mega-projects, including revenue shortfalls, cost overruns and spillovers, as well as revenue lost to tax breaks," according to The New School, Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis. The New York Independent Budget Office highlighted as much, with their analysis of the Hudson Yards financing failure and cost to the public. The Gothamist asked if we would ever see the 4.5 Billion of taxpayer money spent to cover the shortfall; have we? Maybe in spreadsheets or reports validating the financial finagling success to be used for their next adventure?

Furthermore, "the Related Companies, the developer behind Hudson Yards, raked in at least \$1.2 billion," with the help from the Empire State Development (ESD) gerrymandered map qualifying the site for a "controversial investor visa program known as EB-5," that "was designed to lure foreign investment to distressed communities." But "Instead, it subsidizes luxury real estate."

The Governor Hochul's guiding principle and unwavering support for Vornado Realty, Steven Roth's plan to siphon more tax dollars, crush people's homes, and eliminate small businesses in the Penn Station Area, and the indifference for the the public's interest can easily be reasoned—void of integrity—by the generous campaign donations.

The Hochul, Empire State Development Corp (ESD), and Vornado Realty Trust's development plan ignores the housing crisis and the worst vacancy rate and economic downturn of our time to demolish almost 20 million square feet around the Pennsylvania train station, "to bring more commercial property rentals to an already overly commercialized mecca," to complete their "river to river" commercial dream.

Public transit suffers as a result of Hochul's blatant disregard for—[Through-running's viability](#)—a more efficient modern fluid transit system that would afford more convenience, access, and reach to other regions.

The priorities are clear, particularly, when you allow the homelessness conditions to persist with the millions and billions spent on development. You can not rightly say you are developing with the kind of outcomes seen on our streets, hospitals, ERs, food lines, elderly facilities; the cost burdens wear on the public's psyche and destroys them physically, until their earning power is diminished, before being pushed out of their homes and neighborhoods and into nursing homes or worse, the streets.

Our economic system is destroying lives, natural resources, healthcare, housing, food systems, and driving people out of existence. As our economy degrades further, this vulgar system, in its more brutal form, that is participating in the genocide and waring efforts happening overseas, will come to feast more voraciously here at home. It's time to put the monster on a diet. We need to stop allowing corporate to use the City as a piggy bank. We need protections from the laws we make and we need protectorates against the rampaging influences of the corporate class.

People need to be a forethought, not an afterthought. If you truly want this city to be progressive and humane, refuse this plan, mine it for anything of value, don't work within a bubble, and bring the City councils together, with the public advocate, and—equally—the people, with their advocates, experts, nonprofits, and advisors, along for the ride.

In other words, let us grab a little bit of democracy from the [oligarchy control](#) to have a more conclusive discussion without [private equity](#) and the hierarchical positions already taken, influenced, planned, and already in the works, and going through the optics of inclusiveness ([case in point: Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea Houses planned demolition](#)).

Respectfully,
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