



RE: SoHo NoHo Upzoning Would Destroy More Affordable Housing Than It Creates+ Make These Neighborhoods More Expensive+Less Diverse

Dear NYC Elected and Appointed Officials:

The Victorian Society in America was established in 1966 by Margot Gayle to save irreplaceable 19th and early 20th century buildings specifically in the Soho Cast Iron Historic District. Please do not allow this work and the success of the Soho-NoHo historic districts be undermined by this giveaway to developers that will not result in the affordable housing that we all desire.

The City's historic buildings and districts contain and protect thousands of affordable housing units (Soho, Noho, Upper West Side, Crown Heights, etc.) yet the current administration repeatedly threatens historic neighborhoods throughout the city with the hackneyed and uninformed notion that they are "elite." People want to live in, work in and visit the great historic buildings of New York, yet we are losing significant structures to create commercial and luxury residential buildings that no one wants, needs or can afford. Often proposed new development never gets built and we are left with vacant lots for years, even in midtown Manhattan.

As a recent study by Village Preservation has shown, the Mayor's proposed upzoning of SoHo and NoHo would actually make these neighborhoods richer, whiter, less diverse and more expensive, create much less affordable housing than projected and likely destroy more than it creates, all while allowing grossly out of scale new construction and big box chain stores. I oppose it and urge you to as well.

The Community Alternative Rezoning Plan, by not employing any upzoning, would destroy no affordable housing, require deeper and broader new affordable housing in new residential construction at a scale which matches the neighborhood, and allow reasonable sized retail but not big box chain stores. It would maintain the character of this neighborhood while making it more equitable, diverse, and affordable the exact opposite of the Mayor's plan. The Mayor's plan would also have an enormous impact on adjacent neighborhoods like Chinatown and the Lower East Side, pushing out longtime residents and businesses and making those neighborhoods less diverse and more wealthy and expensive too.

The Mayor's plan allow new development of an egregious scale up to 2.4 times what current rules

allow open the floodgates to giant big box chain stores that would force out long time local businesses, push out longtime tenants in rent-stabilized units and legally protected lofts, and encourage the demolition of historic buildings. This is wrong and unacceptable for these neighborhoods, and being done in the name of affordable housing, revising outdated zoning, and promoting retail diversity. All of these goals can be better achieved with the Community Alternative Rezoning Plan which a dozen local groups have put forward.

The Mayor's plan would line the pockets of developers who have given generously to his campaign and lobbied for these changes for years. All of the purported goals can be better achieved in a manner consistent with the character of the neighborhood and with the full support of residents of the affected neighborhoods. The current plan is generating nothing but deep opposition from residents and should be rejected.

We strongly oppose any changes to the zoning for SoHo and NoHo which would "upzone" the area or increase the allowable size or scale of development beyond the generous allowances which already exist. The current push by (among others) big real estate interests to upzone the area are utilizing claims that it is the only or best way to address affordability in the area -- which is patently false. I am also strongly against any change that would allow larger retail than current rules allow.

The SoHo/NoHo report issued in early January was vague, though it implied that an upzoning of sites would be warranted if affordable housing is included. This is now being seized upon by vested interests, including groups led and funded by developers who own undeveloped property in the area that would directly benefit financially tremendously from the proposed upzoning. But the zoning for SoHo and NoHo already allows more than ample-sized development, as evidenced by numerous buildings of ten to thirty stories in height which have gone up in the neighborhood in recent years. Addressing important needs like affordable housing and keeping these neighborhoods accessible to artists does not require zoning changes that would result in construction significantly larger than what the current rules allow. More than sufficiently large buildings that include affordable housing can be built on under-developed lots in the neighborhood right now; there is no need to upzone the neighborhood and allow for new development which could be substantially larger than that in order to provide affordable housing. That is just an excuse to give developers bigger windfalls with the fig leaf of affordable housing thrown in to try to make it acceptable. For me, an upzoning is a deal-breaker for any plan for SoHo or NoHo.

The Victorian Society New York also strongly opposes any move to lift the existing 10K Sq ft limit for retail uses. SoHo and NoHo do not need to be further transformed into a mega-mall. While retail uses are important and well-run appropriate ones are welcome, they should not overwhelm the neighborhood, which very large big-box and multi-level stores tend to. We don't need to make the rules looser to accommodate more of these.

Sincerely,

George Calderaro, Preservation Committee Chair

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- Councilmember Inez Barron
- Councilmember Joseph Borelli
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