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Questionnaire for Mayoral Candidates 2025

2025 is the 60th anniversary of New York City's Landmarks Law, the strongest in the nation. Preservation has proved to be a remarkable success for the City, revitalizing neighborhoods, protecting homes, fighting climate change, celebrating historic building crafts, and telling the whole story of New York. Preservation is also a strong economic engine, creating jobs and encouraging heritage tourism. This is all accomplished in under 5% of buildings and building lot area.

General

Give us your track record and history regarding work to support historic preservation in NYC, and feel free to share your favorite landmark.

While I have not been directly involved in many landmarking battles over the years, I have always supported preservation of New York City's historic buildings and neighborhoods. This year, I pointed out the disgraceful condition of Polonaise Terrace, an historic building in the Greenpoint Historic District. This was the nerve center of the Polish community for generations. It wasn't beautiful, but it certainly stood out. I understand that there are plans for it to be redeveloped into a building that will "fit in" better with the historic fabric of Greenpoint, but that doesn't excuse the horrific condition that the building is currently in. I have made clear my positions on some recent flashpoints as well, including preserving and restoring the Dapolito Recreation Center in the Village, saving and restoring West Park Presbyterian Church on the Upper West Side and landmarking the 200-year-old Ketcham Farmhouse in Hollis, arguably the most historic building in that community and southeast Queens.

My favorite landmark is the one that no longer exists: the magnificent old Pennsylvania Station which my father used to take me to as a child, demolished for the current Madison Square Garden and consigning the public to underground warrens and narrow corridors like rats in a maze. One of the biggest mistakes that ever happened in our city. The only silver lining was that it was one of the main instigators for the creation of the Landmarks Preservation Commission 60 years ago.

One of my favorite landmarks that is still standing: the Cyclone in Coney Island.

Housing and Preservation

A great deal of attention is being focused on the need for more housing. Some are claiming historic districts are to blame for a housing shortage, although historic districts are proven to yield lower turnover of residents and businesses and thus stronger communities. Acknowledging that housing is one of the top issues in NYC, how would you prioritize the need for more housing alongside the need to protect beloved historic landmarks and the character-defining neighborhoods that give the city its quality of life?

The first thing that I will say is that we have an affordable housing shortage, not a housing shortage (which you mention in the next question). Historic districts have absolutely not contributed to this issue; this is just false talking points that have been used by developers since landmarking began 60 years ago and has been amplified in magnitude over the past decade by the real estate industry and their political allies. Protecting the landmarks and neighborhoods of New York City and developing new housing do not have to be in opposition to each other, despite what the development industrial complex would have you believe.

My housing plan (<https://www.sliwafor NYC.com/affordablenyc>) goes into great detail about how to get immediate results on creating new housing units or reclaiming vacant ones, including renovating the 6,000+ vacant NYCHA housing units that could hold 6,000 additional families who are in great need of affordable housing; and restoring 28,000+ vacant rent-controlled apartments that have been kept off the market. I am all in favor of developing new buildings, including careful use of air rights, particularly in Manhattan – but never at the expense of the destruction of the character of our neighborhoods around the city.

Most recent land use proposals in New York City have been designed to generate much more market-rate housing than affordable housing, when it's affordable housing that's lacking in the city and most market-rate housing is unaffordable to by far the majority of New Yorkers, and especially those in need. Would you continue to advance zoning changes that would increase the already considerable amount of expensive market rate housing being built? And how would you balance this against preserving the character of neighborhoods in terms of scale and built environment?

Here are some very straightforward solutions that I would make into administration policy should I be elected Mayor:

Mandatory Affordability as Part of As-of-Right Zoning

Developers currently get “bonus” height or bulk allowances for offering to include affordable housing in their projects. But this housing often is not permanently affordable, nor is it affordable to the vast majority of residents in New York City who need it, and it is only offered to those developers seeking to build out-of-context. In order for affordable housing to work, it needs to be a mandatory part of as-of-right zoning.

LOCATIONS

- Areas at high risk of gentrification (generally that are zoned R6 or higher)
- At least 15% of units in new construction projects will be reserved for low-income families or individuals. If units targeted middle income families, the requirement would be 25%. If supportive housing is provided instead the requirement would be 10% of units.

INCOME OF RESIDENTS

- 100% affordable units for households at or below 60% of the *local* area median income, calculated based on zip code or community district rather than current formula based on the greater NYC region.

PRIORITY COMMUNITIES

- Families, including families with children and intergenerational households
- Tenants on fixed incomes such as seniors and disabled
- Households experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness

This would require a zoning text change be adopted by the City Council after community board and City Planning Commission review.

I will never sacrifice the character of our neighborhoods across the city just to satisfy the insatiable hunger for land that developers have. As I've stated publicly, I will bring back real planning and decision-making to each and every community instead of centralizing it at City Hall and do my best to memorialize this so that future administrations do not have the ability to overturn it.

How much weight do you give to the theory that increasing the production of market rate housing, which NYC already produces more annually than any other city in the country, is needed to make housing prices more affordable for everyone, especially the neediest? If you do give it weight, how do you square this with the experience of cities like Vancouver, B.C., which has produced the newest housing per capita in North America, and seen its housing prices skyrocket to among the highest in the world? And how do you square it with the fact that since 2010 NYC has added

housing at 8 times the rate it's added people, and yet our housing prices have risen faster than the national average or U.S. city average?

The only time in recent history that we have seen market-rate rents go down was when there was a mass exodus from the city during COVID, and that quickly reversed itself once the pandemic was past us.

Unchecked inflation means the cost of building goes up and therefore rent goes up as well. In addition, when you build market-rate housing with no controls, those that own the buildings can choose to rent units at whatever amount they want – or keep them off the market if they don't get the rent that they want, which is increasingly happening on a regular basis. Fact: we have been in a "housing emergency" in New York City (defined as less than a 5% vacancy rate) continuously since 1948. The population has waxed and waned since then, and we have 1.3 million more residential units since 1960 with almost the same population. We cannot build our way out of this crisis: the "Abundance" agenda pushed by Democrats today is a repackaging of "Reaganomics" from the 1980s. It didn't work then, and it will not work now.

How would you increase incentives from more affordable housing?

See above.

Would you consider requiring all new multi-family housing to include affordable units, rather than only imposing affordability requirements as part of a very large upzoning, which has been city policy?

See above.

Adaptive Reuse and Preservation

There are many older buildings such as offices and schools that can be converted into housing and other uses. 53.1% of Manhattan's office buildings are considered Tier I or Tier II (the most optimal) candidates for residential conversions, as compared to one-in-six office buildings nationwide. What would you do to help facilitate these conversions?

Converting older commercial buildings into residential housing is a key plank of my housing plan. Adaptive reuse is one of the great superpowers of historic buildings (and buildings in general), not just here but across the country and even the world. Repurposing existing buildings, whether through restoration, renovation or combining it with new additions is not only the most environmentally friendly way to build with the lowest carbon footprint, but also the best way to maintain the character of a street or neighborhood. Older office buildings are often excellent candidates for adaptive reuse for housing because the layouts and floor plates lend themselves to that use.

Existing older buildings are often an enormous reservoir of affordable housing — either due to rent regulations or market conditions and location or both. What would you do to help preserve this older affordable housing stock and keep it affordable?

The recent changes to zoning through the City of Yes is one of biggest threats to the retention of existing older buildings and current affordable housing; the Charter Revision Commission's Land Use Ballot Proposals - #s 2, 3 & 4 – are even more dangerous. As a plaintiff in the City of Yes lawsuit, I believe that we have a very good chance of overturning this giveaway to the developers in the courts. I have also committed to overturning the City of Yes on Day One of my administration should the courts rule against us, which can be done through a combination of executive orders and other actions. It is my number one priority in my Housing Plan. In addition, the Charter Ballot proposals will be heard in court on October 15th and I believe they will be overturned as – once again – Mayor Adams violated the law, this time State Environmental law, by not filing an Environmental Impact Statement. I believe overturning the City of Yes and stopping the Ballot Proposals will immediately shut down the moneymaking ability to demolish existing buildings with real affordable units to replace them with luxury housing that developers were looking to cash in on. Some of my other

policies include prioritizing the retention and creation of new rent-stabilized units for seniors, veterans and working and middle-class families instead of subsidizing luxury and corporate developers as the current administration is doing.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission

Recently, the Landmarks Preservation Commission Chair abruptly retired, and there was a significant turnover among the volunteer commissioners. Please describe the qualities and perspectives of your ideal LPC Chair, and LPC Commissioners.

The Commission has a long history of ignoring historic buildings and districts outside of Manhattan and brownstone Brooklyn. It has consigned many formerly incredible buildings and neighborhoods to the wastebin of history, with terrible results echoing to this day. There's an old saying that I totally agree with: if George Washington lived in a house in Queens for ten years, it would not be worthy of designation; if he stopped by to use the bathroom in a building in Manhattan, it would be designated a landmark on the spot. This double-standard must be ended. We can't save every building in the city, but the fact that the Commission has been so incredibly biased – and in the past decade, much more so with all sorts of purity tests based on specific social agendas – means that there's a lot of catching up to do around the city if we want to have true “fairness and equity” throughout New York when it comes to preservation.

Many of the Chairs that the Landmarks Preservation Commission has had over the years were deeply interested in the preservation of New York City, even if they didn't have the schooling or professional background, i.e. they were “civilians” in this aspect. Unfortunately, I think that the recently departed Chair, for all of her professional bona fides, was more interested in “checking the boxes” than preserving important buildings and sites across the city. The fact that the least number of buildings – by far – has occurred under the Eric Adams administration speaks volumes.

I would also focus on the staff. They have long acted as gatekeepers in the past. If a Request for Evaluation didn't pass muster with the researchers, it would never make it to the Commissioners for review, even if those buildings clearly warranted a discussion and were popular with the public to save and restore these buildings for the future. Again, we get to the idea of “purity” in preservation, which is a fiction. Buildings change over time, some for the better, many for the worse. My ideal Chair and Commissioners are people who appreciate that each individual community across the city has landmark-worthy buildings that are central to its history and hold local historical and cultural value, not necessarily some architectural movement or greater themes. Many past designation requests were rejected based on reasons that could have been applied to others but weren't because of a change of architectural taste by the staff itself.

Under the current administration, new landmark designations have dropped to their lowest level during the entire 60-year history of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, lagging behind even the Giuliani and Beame Administrations. Additionally, the Commission has regularly avoided considering designations of endangered sites, and focused a great deal of its limited number of designations on sites facing no foreseeable or even potential threat, and sites where designation might be duplicative or of limited effect. Is this a trend you would continue or reverse, and if so, how?

See above. Also, I would reverse the trend by decentralizing the Landmarks Preservation Commission's process by creating “satellite” Commissions in each borough to better interface with the public; the Commission has a long history of being aloof from the public. I would also create a legal mechanism that would allow the public to recommend buildings and sites for landmark designation, and the Landmarks Preservation Commission would have to take action in a public setting, not behind closed doors. In addition, I would support new legislation that would allow Councilmembers to directly recommend designation of buildings within their Council District boundaries without waiting for the Landmarks Preservation Commission to designate the buildings first.

Would you increase resources for the Landmarks Preservation Commission to enable them to expand and expedite the consideration of landmark designations as well as review applications and plans submitted?

Yes, without hesitation.

In January 2021, LPC launched its Equity Framework, which reaffirmed the agency's commitment to “designations that represent New York City's diversity and designations in areas less represented by landmarks.” Would you support increasing LPC staff resources so that they can work collaboratively with community members to survey, identify, and protect sites in lesser-resourced neighborhoods in the outer boroughs?

Yes. See above.

Vulnerable Buildings

In recent years we've seen a disturbing increase in historic buildings damaged or destroyed due to neglect or illegal or unsafe work on the building or neighboring buildings — even of landmarked buildings. What would you, as Mayor, do to address this?

The purposeful neglect and illegal demolition of buildings, particularly in the Village, that has occurred during the Adams administration – and the fact that the administration itself has been aiding and abetting the perpetrators of this destruction – is outrageous. This is absolutely criminal, and charges should be brought against anyone who does this. They should also have their intentionally blighted properties seized by the city if they refuse to repair and restore them. In addition, we have seen a number of city-owned buildings going through the same cycle of demolition by neglect (the Dapolito Recreation Center which is endangered and historic barrack buildings in Fort Totten which were demolished last year, for example). As Mayor, I would immediately set up a task force to determine where the location of these buildings, both private and city-owned are – landmarked or not – and use the power of our city's agencies for good instead of helping the people who are harming our city for personal gain.

Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act

What is your position on the Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act proposed in Albany, which would override city rules to allow demolition of landmarked historic houses of worship and exceedingly out of scale new construction in residential neighborhoods, all for including as little as 13% “affordable” housing, with “affordable” housing that could be unaffordable to the vast majority of neighborhood and even city residents.

I am 100% opposed to this legislation, as it is just another extension of the City of Yes.

2025 Charter Revision Land Use Ballot Measures

What is your position regarding the three land use ballot questions being placed before voters from the Mayor's Charter Revision Commission, which would concentrate decision-making authority with whoever the Mayor is and remove the role of the City Council? How do you address the argument that typically the Council's role has been to require deeper and broader affordability in projects, insist upon necessary infrastructure upgrades to address the impacts of projects, and ensure that developments are right-sized for their surroundings, and this would eliminate their role from the process?

See above RE: lawsuit. I am also making it clear to voters that they should vote NO on all ballot proposals, particularly #s 2, 3 & 4.

2025 Charter Revision Land Use Ballot Measures

How would you address the issue of increased streetscape incursions and changes, including Link5G towers, street and sidewalk dining, Citi Bike, deliverista hubs, etc.?

Starting at the end of Mayor Bloomberg's reign and accelerating dramatically with De Blasio and Adams, the lobbyists have been given clear access to the levers of government. The agency capture, particularly at the Department of Transportation, City Planning and other critical agencies by Transportation Alternatives, Open New York and other fake “non-profits” funded by billionaires is appalling. The first thing that I would do as Mayor? Kick the lobbyists to the curb, outside of government where they belong. Next, in order to focus on what's right for neighborhoods – not “industry best practices” which means the exact opposite – the agencies will not just dictate policy to communities and Community Boards but sit down at the table with them in order to come to the right response and plan of action.

Density

Is there a density limit for new development in residential neighborhoods you would identify? For residents? For building mass? Our city has the most densely populated and built-up neighborhoods in the country, and in much of the world, and yet many of these densest neighborhoods are being asked to add more and more. What's the limit, and/or what needs to go along with greater density at those levels to maintain quality of life and livability?

The City of Yes and Charter Ballot questions are the exact opposite of what should be happening. These zoning and land use changes maximize development potential everywhere, regardless of the needs of the community. Unfortunately, this situation was set up by the idea of “fair share” for neighborhoods across the city. Every neighborhood is different; many neighborhoods, particularly in the outer boroughs, do not and will never have the infrastructure and public services that increased density requires. Under my administration, the Department of City Planning would examine each and every neighborhood within all 59 Community Boards specifically to look at infrastructure and public service needs before upzonings or other major increases in density are proposed. If the infrastructure and public services are not there, then the new development would simply not be allowed. We must be a city that is responsive and responsible to its residents and according to the limitations of its capabilities, not at the whim of developers who build their project and leave our citizens holding the bag.

There are several instances where the Economic Development Corporation has been tasked with meeting housing goals, and a site is then re-zoned to accommodate these benchmarks. These are often out-of-scale developments that are spot-zoned, and out of the neighborhood context. Do you believe the EDC should be free of the typical checks and balances that govern private development?

The EDC has been completely out of control under the Adams administration. Under his directive last year to find all city-owned property and either zone it for development or give it away to his donors and developer friends, this “agency” has been turned into a private real estate company solely focused on disposing of the city’s assets to private parties for financial gain. A great example of this is the old Flushing Airport property in Queens; 90 acres of wetlands – which should clearly be a public park – are now in danger because the EDC controls the land and announced – with great fanfare in July – that they would be filling in at least 30 acres to build thousands of units of housing in a place where it clearly doesn’t belong. As Mayor, I would rein in this agency, audit the books and transfer as much of its holdings to other agencies with specific directives that are for the public good, not for private developers to benefit at our city’s expense.