

**Testimony of Vicki Been, Commissioner of the
Department of Housing Preservation and Development
City Council Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises
Hearing
on the
Zoning for Quality and Affordability Proposal
February 10, 2016**

Good morning, Chair Richards, members of Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises, all City Council members, and members of the public. I am Vicki Been, Commissioner of the City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development, and I am here to support the proposal, Zoning for Quality and Affordability that will bring New York City's zoning codes into the 21st Century.

Better known now as ZQA, this amendment is critical to help meet the affordable housing needs of New York City's wonderful seniors, and to remove inefficient regulatory barriers that make high quality affordable housing more difficult and more expensive to build.

Slide: Community Needs – More Senior Housing:

The population of city residents who are 65 years old and older is projected to increase by 40% between now and 2040. That means we will need to house over 400,000 additional seniors in the coming years. But we're not even meeting the needs of today's seniors: a recent survey estimated that more than 200,000 low-income seniors are currently on waiting lists for affordable housing citywide, with an average wait of seven years. And our seniors are more likely to be low income, to be rent burdened, and to live on a fixed income than other city residents. Most senior housing cannot be constructed without subsidies, but federal support for senior housing has all but dried up, so the City must make our dollars for senior housing produce as many homes as possible by reducing the barriers to affordable senior housing our outdated zoning resolution imposes.

Slide: Outdated Zoning Limits Senior Housing:

Our zoning code works against itself. While it recognizes that affordable senior housing is an important need, it hasn't allowed a way to fit that housing into a well-designed building. Today's codes make it

impossible to build a building that accommodates both accessibility requirements and other special features, such as the common space necessary for the elderly to live comfortably, connect with others, and be safe. Current zoning also does not recognize the spectrum of senior housing and care facilities our elders need, including independent living, assisted living, and nursing care.

Slide: Outdated Zoning Means Fewer or Lower Quality Affordable Homes:

Current codes restrict the creation of affordable housing in other ways. For example, our voluntary inclusionary program, allowed in certain medium- and high-density districts, offers housing providers additional height or other space if affordable units are built. But, limits on the size and shape of buildings under current rules mean many buildings cannot actually use that added space. As a result, we get fewer affordable homes from that program than we would like. Providers that do participate have been forced to squeeze the affordable units into cramped building envelopes, creating poorly designed apartments, with low ceilings, for example.

Slide: Expensive Unused Parking Means Fewer Homes:

Under today's requirements, millions of taxpayer dollars are being spent building costly parking spaces, instead of providing more affordable units. Building on-site parking costs around \$50,000 per parking space – indeed, I've seen costs go to \$80,000 per space. But for all that money, we get very little – those parking spaces often sit empty. Our research shows that affordable-housing residents own fewer cars than other families, and those who do own cars, especially seniors, aren't able or willing to pay the fees for parking. So those costly parking spaces often sit empty. The space the garages or lots take up, and money required to build them, should be used for more

housing, community facilities, or open space. Affordable housing providers will tell you about the terrible waste those empty parking lots represent, and about the very real need to use those resources instead to give more low-income seniors a place to live their last years, or to provide facilities or services that better serve seniors' needs.

Slide: Example – Crotona LGBT Senior Housing

Take for example, a proposed project in the Bronx called Crotona LGBT Senior Housing. The 82-unit residence is required to build 10 parking spaces, which add almost \$2 million to the cost of the project. The provider anticipates that a maximum of four spots will be used. There will be thousands of people who apply for the apartments, and can't be accommodated. Wouldn't it be better to devote the money used to provide empty parking spaces to house more of those people?

These are serious problems that the affordable housing community must wrestle with every day as it tries to stretch dollars to address the city's affordability crisis. ZQA is a thoughtful, comprehensive approach to modernizing the Zoning Resolution to address these issues, which have limited our ability to provide high quality affordable and senior housing for years. On behalf of all those nonprofits, community development organizations, financial institutions and other partners HPD works with day in and day out to build and run affordable and senior housing, I appreciate your willingness to tackle the daunting task of working through the minutia of updating the zoning resolution. While the task is difficult, to be sure, it is critical to our low income families and seniors.

Let me turn to Chair Weisbrod, who will explain the changes in more detail. And let me take the opportunity to thank him and his incredible team. Many administrations have seen the need to update the zoning resolution; but Chair Weisbrod actually took on the immense challenge of doing so.