

text amendment

Buildings can be designed to **save money for owners and tenants, provide a healthier environment, reduce the burden on city infrastructure, and support our ecology.** But green building features are sometimes discouraged or even prohibited by existing zoning regulations.

This proposal seeks to modernize the Zoning Resolution to **remove impediments to the construction and retrofitting of greener buildings.** It will give owners more choices for the investments they can make to save energy, save money, and improve environmental performance. This proposal will help bring our buildings into the 21st century while protecting the character and quality of life of our neighborhoods.



Via Verde, the Bronx. Courtesy: Jonathan Rose Companies

FEATURES OF THE PROPOSAL

- **Energy-efficient building walls:** Well insulated exterior walls reduce heating and cooling demands, lowering home heating bills and summer air conditioning bills. But zoning today sometimes prohibits adding insulation to the exterior of existing buildings or penalizes thicker walls.



Courtesy: Escape Estates Homebuilders

The proposal: Allow *existing buildings* to add external insulation within the property line while exempting it from floor area calculations and yard regulations. This typically adds about four inches of wall thickness, but up to eight inches would be allowed to encourage highly efficient retrofits.

For *new buildings* whose walls are substantially more efficient than required by code, up to eight inches of wall thickness could be exempted from floor area, encouraging high-performance buildings without changing the amount of usable space in the building.



Courtesy: Chris Benedict, R. A

- **Sun control devices:** These horizontal or vertical projections can help reduce air-conditioning needs and lighting bills by providing glare-free natural light, while adding interest to the building façade. Zoning today often does not allow sun control devices to project over required open areas.



Courtesy: NYC DCP

The proposal: Above the ground floor, allow *sun control devices and awnings* to project 2'-6" over required open areas, but not to cover more than 30 percent of the façade from which they project.



Courtesy: Kaplan Thompson Architects

- **Solar energy:** Solar power can provide pollution-free energy for electricity or hot water, reducing utility bills and carbon emissions. Today, zoning does not allow solar installations above the maximum permitted building height.



Courtesy: NYC DOB

The proposal: Allow *solar panels* on flat roofs anywhere below the parapet, regardless of building height. Taller solar installations would be subject to limits on roof coverage and height. On sloping roofs, panels would be allowed to be flat-mounted (less than 18" high).



Courtesy: Solar Energy Systems

- **Other rooftop equipment:** In a dense city where space is at a premium, rooftops can serve a wide range of purposes, including managing stormwater, providing recreation space, or generating renewable energy. In addition, systems such as boilers and cogeneration facilities can be safer and more efficient when located on roofs. Key building systems such as stair and elevator bulkheads must also be located on roofs. However, zoning districts with contextual height limits restrict the space available for these systems above the maximum building height.



Courtesy: NYC DEP

The proposal: Allow low-lying features such as *green roofs*, recreational *decks*, and *skylights* anywhere below the parapet, regardless of building height. A guardrail no more than 30% opaque would be allowed up to 3'6" above the top surface of the roof. Greater volume, similar to what is already allowed in many Special Districts, would be allowed above the maximum building height to accommodate modern *bulkheads*, with requirements for setback and screening of equipment.

- **Rooftop greenhouses:** Greenhouses on industrial, commercial and school buildings can enable year-round local food production and provide valuable educational opportunities within a dense urban environment. Unfortunately, limitations on floor area or building height have constrained opportunities for these facilities.

The proposal: By certification of the Chair of the City Planning Commission, allow a *greenhouse* to be exempt from floor area and height limits, provided that it is located on top of a building that does not contain residences or sleeping accommodations. These greenhouses must not exceed 25 feet in height, must set back six feet from the roof edge, and must include practical measures to limit water and energy consumption.



Photo by Ari Burling. Courtesy: NY Sun Works

- **Wind energy:** Wind energy generation in New York City makes the most sense where winds are consistent – on taller buildings and near the waterfront. Today, small wind turbines are allowed if they do not exceed a building height limit.



Courtesy: Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Architects

The proposal: On buildings taller than 100 feet, a *wind turbine* assembly may rise up to 55' above the rooftop (including the pole and rotor), provided it is set back at least 10 feet from any property line. In addition, free-standing or building-mounted turbines would be allowed in commercial developments near the waterfront. Installations must follow all requirements from the Department of Buildings.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the proposed zoning text amendment, including information about the public review process, which began on December 12, 2011, visit www.nyc.gov/zonereg.