



**STATEMENT BY HOWARD SLATKIN, DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING,
NYC DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING TO 2019 CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
March 21, 2019**

Good evening, Commissioners. My name is Howard Slatkin, and I am the Deputy Executive Director for Strategic Planning at the Department of City Planning.

The history of land use planning in the City Charter traces an arc from traditional, static notions of comprehensive planning to a practice of strategic planning that supports timely responses to a rapidly changing environment, and informs a robust public land use review process with data and consistent objectives.

The most recent attempt to create a citywide comprehensive plan was the 1969 Plan for New York City. Undertaken in part to enable the City to qualify for Federal public housing funds, it was outdated by the time it was complete, widely criticized, and never adopted.

Following the failure of the 1969 Plan, the 1975 Charter Revision Commission eliminated the requirement for a master plan, and established ULURP, to decentralize the land-use decision making process. The changes reflected the planning profession's broader shift away from comprehensive plans and other master-planning tools such as Urban Renewal.

In 1989, Charter revisions established a strategic planning function to help prevent the land-use decision process from becoming overly politicized and driven by short-term considerations. Instead of a master, or comprehensive, plan, the aim was to supply facts, analysis, and consistent objectives to help anchor decisions in clear planning rationales.

The City uses the strategic planning model today in a range of ways. Through OneNYC, the City has articulated principles and priorities for sustainable and equitable growth, including citywide goals for housing creation. DCP regularly undertakes strategic initiatives to advance citywide strategies that address planning issues of pressing significance. Recent examples are Mandatory Inclusionary Housing, Zoning for Quality and Affordability, and Zoning for Flood Resiliency. By using the Internet and a wide variety of interactive tools (the Community Portal, ZoLa, etc.), which the 1989 Charter commissioners could not have imagined, the Department today makes far more data and analysis available to both decision makers and to the public than ever before.

There is sometimes a view expressed that if we already had a citywide master plan, the individual decisions that can be so challenging and contentious would become easier or even unnecessary. But it's important to recognize that there is no comprehensive plan that would obviate the need for informed and sensitive decision making based on detailed consideration of specific facts and local conditions. (It's also worth keeping in mind that local constituencies frequently ask that citywide programs, such as MIH and ZQA, be tailored and customized to address local priorities.)

In implementing the objectives of OneNYC, or any plan of such scale, goals and objectives often have inherent tensions and must be balanced. Take, for instance, the question of whether a plot of City-owned land within a neighborhood should be used for open space or affordable housing. There is no citywide plan that can predetermine an appropriate and equitable local outcome. This is the job of ULURP – it allows NYC officials to balance competing equities, based on sound information and consideration of all views and voices.

A nimble and practical approach to citywide strategic planning can support timely and equitable decision making, but approaches that require every land-use decision to be made twice or divert substantial resources away from action would detract from our ability to undertake responsive planning for New York City's dynamic environment and pressing needs.