



STATEMENT BY MARISA LAGO, CHAIR OF THE NYC CITY PLANNING COMMISSION AND THE DIRECTOR OF THE NYC DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING TO 2019 CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
March 21, 2019

Good evening. My name is Marisa Lago. I am the Director of the Department of City Planning and Chair of the City Planning Commission.

My testimony will focus on three topics: the importance of continuing to rely on as-of-right development to meet the needs of a diverse and welcoming city, the necessity of having a workable ULURP process to create capacity for growth, and the role of the City Planning Commission and the Department of City Planning.

In New York, unlike other large, industrial-era U.S. cities, we are at all-time highs for both population and jobs. In 2000, we matched our previous peak, set in 1970. Since then, we have added over 700,000 people – an entire Seattle – and become far more ethnically diverse. And, we are continuing to grow.

If we cannot continue to make room for immigrants, for our children, and for future generations of New Yorkers, we will fail to meet the needs of our most vulnerable residents, and we will cease to be the diverse and welcoming city that has defined us through history.

As-of-right development is the lifeblood of our built environment. We should not threaten it by increasing the number and type of land use actions that are subject to ULURP.

- Over 80 percent of new housing produced since 2010 has been built as-of-right. Without this development, approximately **300,000 New Yorkers** – an entire Pittsburgh – would not have the homes in which they live today.
- If, as in San Francisco, every project had to go through discretionary review, the number of housing units in our city would be far less, markedly increasing the pressure on our most vulnerable residents.

The existence of a sound, workable **ULURP** process is indispensable to creating the capacity for future as-of-right development, and to supporting the production of permanently affordable housing.

- Since 2010, about 30 percent of the new housing that has been built occurred as-of-right, following a ULURP-approved neighborhood rezoning that had increased the amount of housing that could be built.
- An additional 20 percent of new housing has come through ULURP as site-specific actions, about half through applications by private land owners and about half through projects advanced by the City.
- These City projects are typically 100% affordable housing, underscoring the fact that **producing affordable housing relies on a workable ULURP process.**

The ULURP process is premised on local input. It gives Community Boards the opportunity to weigh in first during public review, and it culminates at the City Council, enabling the local Council Member to

play a key role in the final decision. But, to ensure that land use decisions promote a more equitable city, these local community perspectives must be balanced with broader, city-wide views, such as the need to site necessary infrastructure and to meet the housing needs of future generations of New Yorkers.

- Creating enough housing for our growing population is fundamental to addressing displacement pressures in neighborhoods across the city. If our economic success continues, but we fail to provide housing for a growing population, we will become a city where housing is only accessible to the most fortunate.
- The City is doing more than ever to keep low-income tenants in their homes. In addition to a record commitment to fund legal services for tenants, HPD has preserved more than 83,000 affordable homes since 2014.
- While stronger rent regulation is part of the strategy, without sufficient new housing the size of our housing crisis – and the inequality of its distribution – will only grow.

Some express concerns that low-income neighborhoods bear the brunt of most new housing development. Others allege that our growth only serves the most fortunate. I share the passion for equity that underlies these concerns. But this Administration's policies are, in practice, promoting equity by producing housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods:

- Since 2015, the largest share of new housing construction (36%) has occurred in the 25% of neighborhoods with the highest median incomes.
- And about one-third of the new **affordable** housing that has been completed under the Mayor's Housing New York Plan was built in these same, high-income neighborhoods.

Finally, the **Department of City Planning (DCP)** is an indispensable resource to the **City Planning Commission (CPC)**, enabling this deliberative body to make informed decisions in the ULURP process.

- I have worked broadly around the world and have led the planning department in another major U.S. city. I can vouch that DCP is in a class by itself among municipal planning departments.
- The unique quality of our expertise is perhaps best epitomized by our Population Division, which has been the analytical backbone of the multistate legal challenge to the U.S. Census Bureau's proposal to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census.
- DCP's expertise is also evidenced by the fact that other major U.S. cities routinely raid DCP staff to head their planning departments (Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and Seattle, among others)
- The link between DCP and the CPC is vital to ensure that planning decisions are guided by sound information and analysis that is informed by both deep community knowledge and a necessary city-wide perspective.

Thank you.