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CITY PLANNING PROPOSES REDUCTION IN REQUIRED OFF-STREET RESIDENTIAL ACCESSORY PARKING IN DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN

Changes Would Rationalize Zoning Rules to Meet Needs for Off-Street Parking in Transit Hub

June 4, 2012 – City Planning Commissioner Amanda M. Burden announced the beginning of public review for changes to reform the off-street parking regulations in Downtown Brooklyn. The [proposal](#) would reduce the amount of parking that new residential developments are required to provide to better reflect actual parking demand in Downtown Brooklyn, which features some of the best transit access in the city. It would also encourage affordable housing units by eliminating parking requirements for affordable housing. Finally, the proposed zoning text amendment would simplify the unusually complex parking regulations in the Downtown Brooklyn Special District to provide more opportunities for public parking for use by residents, employees and visitors. Citing studies showing that many new residential accessory garages are half empty in the evenings, Downtown Brooklyn civic leaders and property owners have called for revising the parking regulations in the Downtown area to better reflect the actual demand. The proposed changes were developed in consultation with these stakeholders, community leaders and elected officials.

City Planning Commissioner Amanda M. Burden said, "Our goal is to rationalize parking requirements for Downtown Brooklyn, recognizing that it has some of the best transit infrastructure and one of lowest rates of auto ownership in New York City. Our new Downtown Brooklyn Off-Street Parking rules will better allocate parking where it is needed while removing the financial burden of having to provide parking for affordable housing."

The proposal would apply in high-density commercial districts throughout much of the Special Downtown Brooklyn District which generally runs from Tillary Street to Atlantic Avenue, and from Clinton Street in Brooklyn Heights to Ashland Place adjacent to Fort Greene. It would not affect on-street parking.

"Downtown Brooklyn is among the best locations for mass transit access in New York City," said Council Member Stephen Levin. "The fact that so many people want to live here is reflective of that. Building and parking requirements should take mass transit options into consideration and this plan does that. I am encouraged by the possibility of increased affordable housing likely to result from this plan and know that Downtown Brooklyn will continue to be a very desirable location for years to come."

"I am pleased that City Planning is initiating a proposal to reform the off-street parking regulations in Downtown Brooklyn. This policy reform not only supports the economic activity in Downtown Brooklyn, it also eliminates parking requirements for affordable housing. By making the development of these units less costly, we increase the incentive to build much-needed affordable housing, which I have long championed in my district. The Downtown Brooklyn Off-Street Parking amendment is an important step in realizing more affordable housing in Brooklyn," said Council Member Letitia James.

Downtown Brooklyn is the city's third largest central business district and a major transit hub served by seven subway stops, 13 subway lines, commuter rail and numerous buses. It has relatively low car ownership among its residents with just 22 percent of households having a vehicle, compared to 43 percent of residents in Brooklyn and 45 percent in New York City. The area was rezoned to accommodate greater density in 2004, consistent with the Administration's policy over the past decade to foster transit-oriented growth and channel new development to denser, transit-served areas and away from auto-dependent neighborhoods.

Dense, mixed-use neighborhoods with strong transit access, such as Downtown Brooklyn, generally enable residents and workers to get where they want to go by transit or on foot without the need to use a car and without the associated costs of car-ownership. While there is no requirement for community facility or commercial uses to provide parking in the Downtown Brooklyn Special District, current zoning requires parking for 40 percent of residential units in new development. The proposed changes to the parking rules in Downtown Brooklyn are intended to better match the requirements with the needs of residents, workers and visitors. They include:

Reduction of accessory parking for market-rate residential developments from 40 percent to 20 percent of the units to better reflect low car ownership and demand for parking in the new residential buildings. A study sponsored by the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership found parking garages that were required by zoning to serve new residential buildings are only half full in the evenings and on weekends. The numbers in this study are consistent with Census Bureau data that show that approximately 20% of Downtown Brooklyn households own cars. Building

excess parking adds to the cost of new developments, making housing more expensive for everyone. Therefore, DCP proposes to reduce the residential parking requirement to 20 percent of units to better match the actual need for parking of Downtown Brooklyn's residents.

Elimination of parking requirements for affordable units in order to lower the building costs and incentivize the use of the Inclusionary Housing Program. Inclusionary Housing provides a floor area bonus in exchange for the provision of permanently-affordable housing. Census Bureau data show that lower income households have fewer cars than other households. In addition, affordable housing subsidy programs often cannot cover the high costs of building structured parking, and the costs of building parking cannot easily be recouped by charging residents of affordable units, who are less able to pay a fee for parking than residents of market-rate housing. Therefore, DCP proposes eliminating the parking requirements for new affordable housing in Downtown Brooklyn.

Measures to provide more opportunities for the public to park in Downtown Brooklyn. The Downtown Brooklyn Partnership's survey of parking utilization in accessory and public parking garages shows that it is common practice in Downtown Brooklyn for a parking facility to be used by residents, visitors and workers. However, current zoning regulations restrict the daily or hourly use of accessory parking garages in some parts of Downtown Brooklyn only to residents of the building. Parking facilities in a vibrant district with a mix of commercial, community and public facilities, and residential uses work best for a community when they are public, and available to anyone who needs them. The proposed changes would provide more flexibility to locate required accessory parking off-site, to build small underground public garages in Downtown Brooklyn and to allow accessory parking garages to be available to all residents, workers and visitors in Downtown Brooklyn. Accordingly, the proposal calls for:

- Applying consistent rules across Downtown Brooklyn to allow accessory residential garages to be used by the public on an hourly or daily basis. This is the current rule in C6 zoning districts covering most of Downtown Brooklyn, and current practice across all of Downtown Brooklyn. The proposal would apply the C6 rules to C5 zoning districts, where non-resident parking currently is limited to weekly or monthly renters. This would provide for more efficient use of limited parking resources.
- Allowing a new building to locate its required parking off-site in a new public garage. This would ease development of sites over subway lines and on sites with high water-tables that otherwise would have been stymied by requirements for costly on-site parking. It also allows for more efficient construction and use of parking.
- Permitting underground public parking garages as of right up to 225 spaces across Downtown Brooklyn, as it is currently allowed for accessory garages throughout the Special District. Public parking is the most efficient parking in Downtown Brooklyn because it is available to all drivers. Currently there are numerous regulations for accessory and public garages and parking lots depending on the particular zoning district, and the proposed changes will simplify and standardize the rules to allow public parking to be built as needed.

Finally, the proposal provides new requirements to enhance the way parking garages function in the neighborhood. These include requiring reservoir spaces to keep waiting cars from backing up into the street, stop signs and speed bumps to reduce conflicts with pedestrians. It also revises size regulations to recognize new types of parking garages, including stackers and automated garages.

DCP's new Downtown Brooklyn Off-Street Parking rules reflect a policy that seeks to better balance community needs for parking, the cost of constructing new housing, maintaining mobility and ensuring an environmentally sustainable future for the city.

The proposed changes will be referred for review by Brooklyn Community Board 2 and the Brooklyn Borough President for 60 days after which they will come back for review to the City Planning Commission and then the City Council. Visit nyc.gov/planning for more details on the proposal or for further information on the public review process.

Department of City Planning

The Department of City Planning (DCP) promotes strategic growth, transit-oriented development, and sustainable communities in the City, in part by initiating comprehensive, consensus-based planning and zoning changes for individual neighborhoods and business districts, as well as establishing policies and zoning regulations applicable citywide. It supports the City Planning Commission and each year reviews more than 500 land use applications for actions such as zoning changes and disposition of City property. The Department assists both government agencies and the public by providing policy analysis and technical assistance relating to housing, transportation, community facilities, demography, waterfront and public space.