

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Statement By City Planning Commissioner Amanda M. Burden On The City Planning Commission Vote For The East Midtown Rezoning**

Today's vote on the East Midtown proposal is an essential step to ensure that this iconic area remains a world class, highly competitive business district for decades to come.

East Midtown holds a critical position in the city's economy, in the region's vast transit system, and in the identification of New York as a world capital of commerce.

It is the densest of the city's job centers, with over 200,000 workers doing business in 70 million square feet of office space with the largest tax base supporting municipal services throughout all five boroughs. And it is home to some of the most prominent buildings of aspirational architecture - including the Chrysler Building, Seagrams and the Lever House.

The strength of East Midtown as a business district is inextricably linked to its unsurpassed transit access. East Midtown is home to the majestic Grand Central Terminal and the adjoining subway station complex. Already one of the nation's busiest transit hubs, the Grand Central transit network is undergoing significant ongoing investment with two major infrastructure projects currently underway, East Side Access and the Second Avenue Subway.

For the most of the past century, as East Midtown became the best business address in the world, there was always a continuous replenishment of the best in new office space, ensuring that this district provided a full spectrum of commercial space for the array of firms that comprise New York's diverse economy.

However, in the past twenty years, the replenishment of newly constructed Class A office space in East Midtown has virtually come to a halt. Of its 400 buildings, 300 are more than 50 years old.

Decades-old zoning lies at the root of the problem.

In the 1980's East Midtown was downzoned to encourage investment to the west of 6th Avenue. While this downzoning served the purpose of spurring development on the west side, it also had the effect of freezing development in East Midtown. In fact, the last major office development in the district was constructed in 1999.

If we are to continue to have a world-class district with top tier state of the art office space, we need to change the zoning -- but carefully. This proposal promotes a modest but strategic amount of new Class A office space - but only on qualifying sites that are large enough to deliver significant new office buildings.

Except for these few sites, the underlying zoning will be kept in place. Most of the urban fabric will remain untouched by this rezoning.

At the same time as the building stock is refreshed, it is critical that improvements to both the pedestrian realm and the transit network are made.

The plan therefore requires that any new development on these select sites must first make an upfront payment into a fund to pay for new public investment in transit and pedestrian improvements, thereby coupling any development with public realm improvements.

Further, in order to implement critical infrastructure improvements before development takes place – the Mayor is committed to advancing a significant portion of these funds.

These early improvements will focus on the Lexington Line at Grand Central subway station. With this commitment, the City will be able to implement priority capital improvements immediately upon adoption of the rezoning, thereby setting the stage for future development and bringing the benefits of the plan to the public in the near term.

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Over the past months, our deliberations on this proposal have been informed by a consistently high level of engagement from a wide array of stakeholders.

Significant refinements have been made to the East Midtown proposal as a result of this process, incorporating

changes requested by community boards, elected officials, and other stakeholders.

These changes include: Encouraging a better mix of uses, requiring groundbreaking sustainability standards that keep pace with advances in green building; and providing the area's most famous iconic landmarks a wider selection of sites to transfer and sell their unused development rights.

We also heard from many participants about the need for a comprehensive framework for greening this district and for improvements to its public realm. Therefore, since June, a team of urban design consultants has been working with community stakeholders through a series of workshops to develop an area-wide plan for pedestrian improvements. This plan is nearly complete and will include opportunities for greening and beautifying streets, and providing targeted improvements at subway entrances and other strategic locations. It will be presented in just a few weeks.

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The plan for East Midtown is a long-term plan. If we are to unlock a necessary but limited amount of new top tier office development in the next decade - which will also provide funding for much needed improvements to the area's pedestrian and transit related networks, it is essential to put the zoning in place now.

I am completely confident that the East Midtown Subdistrict and Rezoning proposal, as modified by the Department, and the Commission herein, will allow East Midtown to usher in the next generation of state-of-the-art and competitive office space and to ensure that the district maintains its vital role in support of the City's economy.

I most enthusiastically vote yes on the plan as [modified](#).

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### **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.