

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 14, 2009

**CITY PLANNING COMMISSIONER DETAILS ACHIEVEMENTS AND
DESCRIBES HOW LAND USE DECISIONS FOSTER SUSTAINABILITY
AT BISNOW SUSTAINABILITY 2010 BREAKFAST**

December 14, 2009, The text of Chair Burden's speech follows:

I want to thank Bisnow for giving me the honor of kicking off this event on the critical and timely topic of sustainability. This could not be a more significant moment in time.

As we meet here today, the Mayor is preparing to leave for Copenhagen where leaders from around the world are discussing the issues of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. There actually appears to be a real possibility for a global agreement on an international pollution reduction plan at this conference. An agreement is the first step in setting us on the path to a global treaty.

And, as the world meets in Copenhagen, a national climate policy is finally under serious consideration in Washington. It is extremely exciting that New York is at the forefront, nationally and internationally, for setting environmental standards for the rest of the country, and that is why the Mayor has been asked to speak in Copenhagen.

While New York City is today already one of the most environmentally sustainable cities in the country, it is more important than ever to understand the range of environmental issues before us in our city, and focus on what we can do, especially in a time of economic constraint, to continue to meet goals of carbon reduction and also to begin to adapt to the expected impacts of climate change.

As we all know, sustainability is a wide-ranging concept that means many things to many people, and part of our task is to effectively communicate what the concept means and what needs to be achieved.

We can measure sustainability with the triple bottom line: of environment, economy, and equity. Reconciling these goals and making them work together, not against each other, will be a key measure of our success.

There are many reasons to cut carbon: to create clean energy jobs, to break our dependence on foreign oil, to provide cleaner air for our children to breathe and to save money through energy efficiency. But most importantly, we must do our share to combat the crisis of global warming.

PlaNYC is our city's blueprint, not only for reducing our carbon footprint, but also for achieving cleaner air and water, and promoting a better, healthier quality of life in our neighborhoods.

Through a wide range of activities and cooperation among public and private partners, we are steadily advancing the many goals of PlaNYC.

Even amidst today's economic challenges, we can make great strides toward our sustainable future by focusing on cost-effective measures that will yield both environmental benefits and savings.

New York has the unique opportunity to become the nation's model for smart growth, liveability AND sustainability.

Let's take smart growth to begin with. New York City is already a step ahead of the pack. The primary reason is our pattern of development: dense, mixed-use neighborhoods centered around an extensive transit network.

We already use 2/3 less carbon per capita than average U.S. residents because of our density and our transit infrastructure.

Over the last eight years our city grew by more than 355,000, which is more than the population of St. Louis. Fortunately, we will continue to grow, and expect to reach 9.1 million people by 2030.

But to be a city that grows in a smart way, we need to redraw our land use map to ensure that we grow in the right places, at transit nodes. Conversely, we need to limit development in low-density auto-dependent areas of the city where additional density means more car use, more congestion, reduction in air quality and increased energy consumption. This, in fact, is what we have been doing over the last 8 years.

We have literally created a new blueprint for the city, setting in place the conditions for sustainable growth, adjacent to our mass transit infrastructure. In 100 adopted rezonings that extend over 8400 blocks or one-fifth of the city, we already have reshaped our land use map for generations to come. And we are continuing to rezone the city in this manner.

Secondly, to be a truly sustainable city, we must make significant capital investments in our transit system and regional transportation network to ensure our long term prosperity and provide alternatives to the automobile. That's why we are extending the Number 7 Line to Hudson Yards, and investing in such crucial projects as the Access to the Region's Core--- a new rail tunnel under the Hudson River -- and East Side Access, which will expand the capacity of the Long Island Railroad.

Equally important, we must ensure that there are real and viable low cost transportation options for all New Yorkers. The DOT has made enormous strides in laying hundreds of miles of new bike lanes. We at City Planning initiated the requirement for secure bicycle parking in all new developments, and we have recently released studies on how to implement both bike share programs and park-and-ride bike stations near mass transit. The DOT has already instituted Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), which has substantially increased the speed and ridership on Fordham Road. New BRT Corridors are being planned on major corridors throughout the City.

Last year we began a comprehensive study of our parking policy, examining where parking requirements might be unnecessarily high in areas served well by mass transit – perhaps unnecessarily increasing the cost of building housing. Soon we will introduce legislation to allow and incentivize car sharing in both public and accessory garages. Car share is a tremendous opportunity for providing a car-when-you-need it without the added costs of insurance and garage fees. And studies have shown that car share not only reduces car ownership, it reduces the frequency of car use. This can reduce congestion and make for cleaner air, lower costs and reduced energy consumption. In the future, we and our partner agencies need to be looking at electric vehicle charging stations, alternative fuels and promoting other sustainable modes of travel such as ferry and water taxi service.

Perhaps the most sustainable and healthy mode of travel is, not surprisingly, walking. We are already a walkable city, but we need to do everything we can to ensure that all streets are vibrant, diverse and beautiful and safe.

As you know, the Mayor announced, as part of PlaNYC, a million tree initiative, and already ¼ of a million trees have been planted since that announcement.

City Planning passed a requirement that new street trees be planted in conjunction with new development citywide, which will result in as many as 10,000 new trees each year. Trees are critical to a sustainable urban environment because they reduce the heat island effect, they consume carbon dioxide and trees help mitigate storm water runoff.

More beautiful sidewalks and more parks also make for a healthier and more liveable city. In addition, the Parks department is converting dozens of schoolyards into playgrounds, and DOT has transformed scores of asphalt islands into popular oases of public open space.

The overriding notion is, that if you live within 10 minutes of a park, you will walk more and enjoy the city more. And vibrant tree-lined streets will make the city a more attractive place for tourists to visit and for businesses and workers to locate.

A greener city is not only an aesthetic goal; it is also a critical component of mitigation for the serious citywide issue of storm water runoff.

This is a larger problem than cannot be handled without significant infrastructure investment, but capturing stormwater by surface plantings, by permeable surfaces, by blue roofs and green roofs, by deep planted bioswales and by limiting expanses of asphalt and paving will go a long way to preventing basement flooding and combined sewer overflow.

This past year we passed planting requirements for commercial and community facility parking lots and, just two weeks ago, introduced a zoning initiative to increase the greening of front yards and to restrict concrete parking pads in lower density neighborhoods.

These initiatives, taken as a whole, will reduce the infrastructure investments that are needed to address storm water overflow.

Conserving water, protecting our waterways, and ensuring the quality of our drinking water are only small parts of a water network that is one of the most identifying features of our city.

We are a city of 5 boroughs and 4 of them are islands. Our water is unquestionably our greatest resource. We have always viewed our land as shaping the water's edge.

We now need to turn that perspective inside-out.

It is really the water that will shape our land and all our boroughs in years to come. This coming year we will complete a new Comprehensive Waterfront Plan to reflect how much our waterfront has changed and opened up in the last 15 years, and how to continue to revitalize it.

And for the first time it will lay out strategies to address the threats posed by climate change, sea level rise and more severe storms. The plan will not only make us a climate resilient city, it will also enhance the ways we use the water for freight and public transportation, maritime businesses and recreation.

As a coastal city with a large population and business community firmly rooted near the water, we must be especially concerned about contributing greenhouse gases which can warm the planet and raise sea levels. Energy efficiency is by far the easiest way to reduce emissions. By reducing energy consumption, we lower business costs AND combat climate change. It is our job to find ways to give all New Yorkers a chance to save on energy costs.

That means that, at the building scale, we must incentivize and facilitate energy efficiency in new building stock, and most importantly in existing structures.

We need to encourage high-performance buildings that use proven methods as well as new cutting edge technologies to conserve and generate power and heat – including solar, wind, geothermal, cogeneration and more.

We want to find ways, both big and small to help builders and owners make their buildings perform better, which will not only help us meet our carbon reduction goals but can also save them money.

In a city with roughly a million buildings, these gains will add up. Housing, non-profits, cultural institutions and businesses, especially small businesses could benefit immensely from lower operating and energy costs. The goal over the next years is to build energy efficiency to real scale and economic sustainability. Investing now in sustainable development is crucial to ensuring New York's overall economic growth.

With our partner agencies, we are working to identify and remove unnecessarily restrictive regulations, in zoning, in the building code and elsewhere that can make it difficult for owners and developers to install green systems, from solar panels to cogeneration to green roofs.

Removing restrictions on rooftop obstructions, encouraging thicker walls to provide better insulation; incentivizing green roofs, renewable energy systems and wastewater reduction will save money, limit wasted energy and reduce carbon pollution.

About City Planning

The Department of City Planning is responsible for the City's physical and socioeconomic planning, including land use and environmental review; preparation of plans and policies; and provision of technical assistance and planning information to government agencies, public officials, and community boards.