
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Affordability

Across federal, state and local agencies and programs, housing cost affordability is commonly determined as 30% of gross income. In other words, if a household is spending more than 30% of its income on rent or mortgage payments, its housing costs are considered unaffordable.

Affordable housing

Because the private housing marketplace falls extremely short of accommodating every household's ability to pay for housing, city, state, and federal governments have programs to facilitate the construction and renovation of housing for a wide variety of households. These programs are often targeted to low- and moderate-income households and through a variety of mechanisms, (i.e., tax abatements and/or subsidies for landlords and housing developers) they reduce the cost of developing and maintaining housing and in turn, pass the savings on to the tenant.

In Community District 9, a remarkable 40% of households make \$20,000 a year or less. Based on the definition of affordability as no more than 30% of income, the most that these households can afford to pay is about \$470 per month in rent.

Area Median Income (AMI)

Area Median Income is a figure put forth by HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) for the New York City metropolitan area which includes the five boroughs, Putnam and Westchester counties. The current median household income for this area is \$62,800 for a family of four.

Balanced Mixed Use Zone

Balanced Mixed Use Zones would maintain the mixed use character of many NYC neighborhoods through mechanisms that permit some conversion from one use to another but would ultimately preserve a balance of industrial and non-industrial uses. They would also include "good neighbor" mechanisms to ensure environmental compatibility over such issues as noise, odor and parking. Over the past few years, the City has proposed and mapped "MX" zones that are mixed use in name only. MX districts allow residential development without any government approvals or mechanisms to maintain a balance of uses. Housing, retailing and office uses can generally afford to pay higher rents than manufacturing and other industrial uses. Over time, blue-collar businesses and jobs are pushed out and the mix that originally made the neighborhood attractive would be lost.

Business Improvement District (BID)

A BID delivers supplemental services such as sanitation and maintenance, public safety and visitor services, marketing and promotional programs, capital improvements and beautification in a designated area. BIDs are funded by a special assessment paid by property owners within the district. Any commercial, retail or industrial area in New York City may apply for BID status through a local sponsor. BIDs must be approved by the local Community Board, the City Planning Commission, the City Council and the Mayor.

Commercial Overlay

A zoning designation that “overlays” a commercial district onto a residential one to allow for retail or other commercial uses on the first floor. Since they are intended for businesses that cater to local, not citywide or regional markets, commercial overlays have size and density restrictions.

Contextual Zoning

Contextual Zoning regulates height, placement and scale of new buildings so that they fit the character of the neighborhoods in which they are located. Also, contextual zoning districts do not contain the loophole that standard zoning districts have that allows a community facility to be built at a much larger scale than its existing neighbors.

Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)

The CBA process begins with interested members of a community who identify how a proposed development project can benefit residents and workers. Once a list of potential benefits is determined, community members meet with the developer and representatives of the city to negotiate a CBA. The CBA is a legal document that becomes part of the city's agreement with the developer. It contains numerous provisions stipulating exactly how the development will benefit the community. Each CBA is unique, reflecting the needs of particular communities.

Community Facilities

A wide range of public and private social, educational, cultural, and religious facilities that serve the non-housing and non-employment needs of city residents. They include, but are not limited to: hospitals, libraries, schools, senior centers, day care, in-patient and out-patient health care centers, recreational centers, and museums.

Community Land Trust

Community Land Trusts are nonprofit, community-based organizations that hold land for the benefit of the localities they serve. They often provide permanent affordable housing to a segment of their constituents. The modern community land trust model was developed in the 1960s by community activists who conceived a democratically controlled institution that would hold land for the common good and make it available to individuals through long-term land leases.

Typically, a community land trust rents or sells the home to a buyer who fits criteria set by its community-based board. The homeowner--usually a low- to moderate-income family--leases the land from the trust for a period determined by the board, usually 99 years. The trust retains ownership of the land, thus lowering the initial home price for buyers, as well as the subsequent purchase prices. The lease is the key to keeping the property permanently affordable by including a resale formula that limits leaseholders to a share of the increase in the home's value when they sell. (While specifics vary with each agreement, profits from the sale are shared between the seller and the trust.)

Eminent domain

In theory, eminent domain is the government's right to take title to private property for a public use upon the payment of just compensation to the landowner. While eminent domain has indeed been historically used for public works projects that provide an overall benefit to an area's residents (such as highways), there have also been examples of its being used for projects that are of questionable benefit to the "public good."

"Eyes on the street"

A term popularized by urbanist Jane Jacobs who wrote that urban streets are safest when neighbors keep many "eyes on the street" because locals are always in the best position to spot and report unusual activity. For example, street-level windows enable people to keep tabs on what is happening on the street with regard to pedestrians, business activities, etc. Also, businesses that stay open late such as galleries and bars can provide "eyes on the street."

Flexible Production/Manufacturing

Generally speaking, flexible production processes strive for the highly efficient use of materials, space and workers to achieve value maximization and product differentiation. Small and medium-size firms engage in flexible production by performing highly specialized activities. The "Just-in-time" system of using a minimum of inventory to deliver products on a short-term basis is an important aspect of flexible manufacturing. The adoption of new technologies that facilitate faster product design and an ability to quickly switch from one product type to another is another key facet of flexible production. Also, a flexible approach recognizes that networking among firms in terms of subcontracting, design collaboration and strategic alliances is an important way of realizing economies of scale.

FAR (Floor Area Ratio)

Floor Area Ratio is the ratio of the floor area of a building to the area of the lot on which the building is located. The zoning code dictates a lot's maximum allowable FAR. For example, for a lot with a maximum FAR of 1, a one-story building could cover the entire lot, a two-story building could cover half the lot, or a four-story building could cover a quarter of the lot.

Greenway

Greenways are corridors of various widths, linked together in a network in much the same way as networks of highways and railroads have been linked. They are typically used by walkers, bikers and in-line skaters.

Green Streets

Launched in 1996, Greenstreets is a citywide program to convert paved, vacant traffic islands and medians into green spaces filled with shade trees, flowering trees, shrubs, and groundcover.

High road (to economic development)

A strategy for economic development that does not just promote business; it works to eradicate poverty and create a society that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. High road strategies value the worker by promoting high-quality, high-wage, and high-productivity jobs. It includes public policies that benefit workers and communities, such as providing education, paying a living wage, protecting the environment and participation in the decision-making process. It includes such things as access to health care, career training and affordable housing.

Inclusionary zoning

Requires that a percentage of housing units in new residential developments be made affordable to low- and moderate-income households. In exchange for providing affordable housing, developers are granted various forms of compensation (i.e., density bonuses, zoning variances, and/or expedited permitting) that reduce construction costs and ensure that developers continue to profit.

Industrial and Commercial Incentive Program (ICIP)

This New York City tax abatement and exemption program is eligible to small manufacturers and developers with manufacturing tenants. Those who make improvements or renovations to their buildings equal to 10% of the property's assessed value can apply to receive an exemption on the increase in property taxes due to those improvements. Spending 25% of the assessed value of the property can make a firm eligible for an abatement of the real estate tax. While the program is relatively simple to access, it could be substantially improved if its benefits could be prorated. The spending threshold (whereby a substantial portion of a building must be renovated) renders it inaccessible to numerous small manufacturing tenants who are interested in simply renovating a portion of a building. The program was renewed by the City and State in Summer 1999, but it was not altered to enable applicants to prorate the benefits.

Local Development Corporation (LDC)

A local organization designed to improve the economy of the area by inducing businesses to locate there. An LDC usually has financing capabilities.

Merchants Association

A formal or informal group of business owners, typically from a contiguous geographic area such as a particular street, who convene an organization to address common concerns.

Mixed use area vs. mixed use zoning

After World War II, many planners encouraged the separation of residential and commercial uses from industrial uses and used zoning to accomplish this. However, older and more historic neighborhoods developed with these uses side by side, or mixed. As such, they are de facto, or naturally occurring, mixed use areas. Today, cities such as New York prescribe mixed use areas by implementing mixed use zoning districts to allow for residential, commercial, and/or industrial uses where they can coexist without conflict.

Neckdown

A curb extension at the corner of an intersection used to slow vehicles and give pedestrians a shorter distance to cross.

Production

A physical process that results in the creation of a tangible good or product.

Setback

Refers to the amount of space local zoning regulations require between a lot line and a building line

Special district (a.k.a. special purpose district)

A special purpose district is a zoning district created by an amendment to the text (and map) of New York City's zoning ordinance. It is a customized district (as opposed to a generic one) intended to either protect a particular area from development pressure or to preserve its unique appearance.

Special Mixed Use District (a.k.a. "MX")

A few years ago the Department of City Planning created a mechanism that would let it implement mixed use zoning districts anywhere in the city. The new "MX" zoning district permits, under certain conditions, both residential and industrial development side-by-side and in the same building.

In theory, MX allows industries already in these zones to continue indefinitely. In practice, by introducing and legalizing residential uses, which generally bring higher land prices and rents, MX has shown a tendency to force industry out of areas. Conversions of industrial buildings to residential use are allowed, with some restrictions, in MX zones.

Tower-in-the-park

An urban design ideology often associated with 20th Century Swiss architect Le Corbusier that was reflected in New York City's 1961 overhaul to the zoning resolution. These changes assumed a large-scale urban renewal approach to redevelopment that included giant, boxy towers isolated in big, open plazas. Tower-in-the-park zoning allows developers to make their edifices taller if they set them back from the sidewalk and surrounded them with open space. Critics of this type of urban design pattern say that it often fails because of poor spatial definition and a lack of maintenance of the outdoor spaces.

Trust for Industrial Space

A Trust for Industrial Space would provide institutional support for industrial retention and development. The TIS would be a new entity established to either directly, or in partnership with other entities and private and or public developers, acquire and renovate space suitable for use by manufacturers. The Trust could own, renovate and manage the space itself, or it could encourage the development of manufacturing space by providing financial incentives and technical assistance to

private developers or not-for-profit organizations committed to the development of manufacturing space.

ULURP (Uniform Land Use Review and Procedure)

A standard procedure by which the City of New York publicly reviews applications affecting the land use of the City. It has mandated time frames within which an application's review must take place, and the key players are the Department of City Planning, the City Planning Commission, Community Boards, Borough Presidents, Borough Boards, the City Council, and the Mayor. In West Harlem, Columbia is filing an application to the City to rezone Manhattanville, and this action triggers the ULURP process.

Underbuilt Sites

Underbuilt sites are defined as lots over 5,000 square feet and developed with less than 50% of maximum allowable floor area ratio; vacant lots (including two or more adjacent lots totaling over 5,000 square feet); gas stations, and parking lots. In addition, Underbuilt sites do not include churches, schools, city facilities, historic landmarks and lots in historic districts or in the proposed Rezoning sub-districts described in Recommendation 1.

Upzoning

Generally speaking, an upzoning action increases the maximum allowable density for development. This is usually done by increasing the allowed density in a residential zone or by rezoning a manufacturing zone to allow mixed or residential uses.

Use

In the context of land use and zoning, "use" refers to the type of activity which occurs on a given piece of land. The most basic use categories are: residential, commercial, and industrial, and community facilities, and each of these broad categories is subdivided into more specific types of uses.

Zero Waste

Zero waste suggests that the entire concept of garbage should be eliminated. Instead of our basic acceptance that waste is produced by a normal course of events, zero waste says that garbage should be thought of as a "residual product" or simply a "potential resource." Adopting zero waste practices can reduce costs, increase profits, and reduce environmental impacts by returning these "residual products" or "resources" as food to natural and industrial systems.

Zoning

Through zoning, a city regulates building size, population density and the way land is used.

